# Table of Contents

## Online Pedagogy  
1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1: Designing an Online Course - Where do I start?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2: Online Assessment - How do I know my students are learning?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3: Active and Interactive Learning - What can my students &quot;do&quot; online?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 4: Content - How can I make, find, and use online resources?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5: Structuring the Course - How do I put it all together and explain it to my students?</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 6: Usability and Visual Design - What can I do to help my students see where to go and what to do?</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 7: Accessibility - How can I help my students who use assistive technology?</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 8: Multimedia - How can I make it, find it, and use it in my online class?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 9: Online Presence - What can I do to ensure my students &quot;see&quot; me?</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 10: Teaching in the Virtual Classroom - How is it different and what can I do to make it better?</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing an Online Course</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching an Online Course</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Presentation - Innovative Academic Technology</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chronicle of Higher Education - Moving Online Now</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Module 1: Designing an Online Course - Where do I start?

Designing an online course: Where do I start?

You may have heard the recommendation to start with the end in mind - the desired learning outcomes for you students. While that's a very valid recommendation, there is more to the process than just having a solid starting point.

Learning Objectives

In this module, we describe Backward Design as a model for developing or revising online courses to improve validity, dependability, and clarity. We also discuss the first aspect of Backward Design -- learning outcomes. By the end of this module, we hope you will be able to:

- apply Backward Design to the development or revision of an online course, and
- write 2-4 measurable learning outcomes for that course

Table of Contents

- The Makeup of an Online Course
- How are Online Classes Different?
- Online Teaching Readiness Survey
- Course Planning with Backward Design
- Writing Good Learning Outcomes
- Practice Drafting Learning Outcomes
- Resources for Learning Outcomes & Backward Design

The Makeup of an Online Course

Flexibility:
Flexibility allows students to review lectures and complete assignments at their own pace versus on-ground where the student is required to be present at a scheduled day and time.

Feedback:
Online feedback can require extensive written critique on student work submissions due to the limited amount of synchronous communication.

Resources:
Access to resources can be easily provided in an online course as a course menu link, file attachment, or a weblink (URL). Below are a few sample resources that can be provided for students to access via a Blackboard course:

- ECSU Library Homepage
- ECSU Help Desk
- ECSU Office of Student Conduct
- Citation Guide, i.e., Perdue Owl
- Academic Tools
  - Tutoring
  - Video Lectures/Guides
  - Study Skill Guides
  - Writing and Grammar Guides
  - Basic Web Skills
- Blackboard Student Help Guides

Communication:
Most communication in an online course is done asynchronously, but it can also be synchronously when properly scheduled in accordance with time zones. ECSU offers Webex and MS Teams as options to meet and discuss topics in a live virtual environment. Below are examples of asynchronous and synchronous communication and how best they can suit the needs of the course. Whether asynchronous or synchronous, similar to an on-ground course, it will require students to reach out to fellow peers and find common ground to build friendships and community.

- Asynchronous
  - Discussion Board
    - Used as a communication tool for students to answer open-ended questions and reply to fellow peers’ posts. Or it can be used as a group discussion for group projects.
    - It can also be used to provide an introduction and Q & A forum. The introduction forum allows students to get to know each other and build a community. As for the Q & A forum, it allows for students to reply to each other’s questions regarding the course, this helps limit the number of questions a faculty member needs to reply to.
  - Journal
    - Allows for students to individually reflect on a weekly or daily basis or it can be used for all students to reflect as a class.
- **Blog**
  - Similar to the Journal tool, a blog allows for a student to frequently update and is intended to be shared with fellow peers. Blogs also have a commenting feature, so that peers can respond to one another’s feedback and thoughts.

- **Synchronous**
  - **MS Teams (Faculty and Students)**
    - Allows faculty to schedule lectures and/or guest lectures, while also providing the opportunity to discuss course topics and material.
    - Students can also create their own MS Team(s) to meet with fellow peers to study, work on a group project, and/or to simply connect with others.
    - Group project presentations
  - **Webex (Faculty Only)**
    - Allows faculty to schedule lectures and/or guest lectures, while also providing the opportunity to discuss course topics and material.
    - Group project presentations
    - **NOTE:** Only ECSU Faculty are provided with Webex accounts, not students.

**IMPORTANT:** Please note within the following modules there will be tool links to software that will be recommended but not supported by ECSU.

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**How are Online Classes Different?**

If you’re new to online teaching and learning, you may be wondering what it’s all about. Often faculty have ideas about online classes based on what they have heard from colleagues here at ECSU or at other schools. What do you think about online classes?

**Transcript of Presentation - What do you think about online classes?** (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article) and HTML View of Presentation

Additional misconceptions about online classes include:

- **You don't know your students**

  Because you don't meet in-person, many faculty believe that you can’t get to know your students in an online class. Experienced faculty report that they often feel they know their online students better than the students in their in-person classes. This is because students who would never speak up in a classroom can feel much more comfortable participating in an online discussion forum, where they have more time to think about what they want to say.

- **Everybody goes at their own pace**

  A standard “everyone progresses together” course is much more efficient and enjoyable for both students and faculty. This is due to the need for ongoing interaction between students, the nature of collaborative work, and the simple issue of logistics.

- **I have to be available 24/7**

  Just because students may email you in the middle of the night does not mean you need to respond to them in the middle of the night. While student questions should be replied to in a timely manner, an immediate response is an unreasonable expectation for both students and faculty. Your syllabus should explain your availability and turn-around time for messages (replying within a 24 hour period is recommended) and your preferred contact method.

- **Everything has to be written**

  Online courses are different from paper correspondence courses in many ways, one of which is the use of audio and video, by both instructors and students. Using phones, tablets, and webcams, faculty can interact with students asynchronously (or synchronously) from with video introductions and video-based feedback to interactive group presentations.

**Experienced voices**

Experienced online instructors uncover their misconceptions over time. In an article in the magazine eLearn, Michelle Everson, a statistics instructor, shares [10 things that she learned about teaching online](#) over the course of 5 years. While everything she shares is insightful, a few points below highlight the dissonance that some new online instructors can feel.

- **Communication can take longer**

  One issue that new online instructors may not consider is that "questions that can be answered verbally in the classroom require a written explanation in the online course, and sometimes, it takes more time to write out a sensible explanation than to say it." In Blackboard, it's easy to use video or audio to explain, but, for most faculty, writing will come more naturally.
The workload is more diffuse

Michelle writes that:

"In some ways, I think the workload for an online course is similar to that of a face-to-face environment — but it seems like more work because it's not as concentrated. For example, in a classroom, an instructor may do the bulk of her work for the week while she is meeting with students, and if all students are together in one place, announcements can be made and questions can be answered for the entire class. In other words, a great deal of teaching can be done in one sitting. An activity (or several activities) can be completed during a single class period, and any issues related to that activity will be discussed in real time with the entire class. Then everybody moves onto the next thing simultaneously.

In the online setting, though, the workload is distributed. Students will likely be working at different times during the week, and their questions will trickle in accordingly. Plus, an activity that might take 20 minutes to complete in a classroom setting might take a few days to discuss online, especially if students are not able to be online together at the same time."

Students want to hear from you

When Michelle first started teaching online, she didn't participate much in student discussions. She, like many new online instructors, didn't want to stifle the students' voices in discussion, and she wanted to give them a place to work together. Student feedback showed that "the students wanted to hear more from me, if anything just to let them know they are on the right track. I now make it a point to participate more and to make sure that students know I'm there in case they need me. I cheer them on, or question them, or provide direct instruction or other examples for them to think about if they are struggling. There are many ways to participate without necessarily giving away all the answers."

Other commonly experienced differences include

You don't have to think of your class in terms of MWF 10-10:50 time blocks

In an in-person class, you may regularly run out of time to finish discussing or explaining something. You may choose to start the next class by finishing the previous class session or you may choose to let it go and move on to what you had planned for the next class. In an online class, all of your explanations and examples are there in a content area for your students from the beginning so you won't run out of time. In addition, if students want to continue discussing questions related to the original topic, they can do so in its discussion forum without taking time away from the upcoming discussion in the following forum. While this isn't an open invitation to put an unlimited amount of content into the course, it does mean your students have a much better chance to work with all the topics in the course and not miss out on things that tend to "drop-off" the end of the course for lack of time.

Students may expect an online class to be less work than an in-person class

Based on a long history of correspondence courses that required no active engagement or interaction, students often think online courses are simply correspondence courses online. Real online courses require both student-instructor interaction and student-student interaction on a regular basis. Students are also expected to actively engage with the content and receive frequent feedback on their progress. Online courses that don't include regular interaction and frequent instructor-initiated feedback are considered to be correspondence courses, and students will not be able to use financial aid to pay for them. Setting clear expectations upfront for both you and your students is often more important in an online class than an in-person class.

Online Teaching Readiness Survey

Assess your Readiness to Teach Online

Teaching an online class requires additional skills that you may not normally use when teaching in-person classes. The survey from the link below will let you check your technology, pedagogy, and organizational skills and attitudes related to teaching online.

* How Ready Are You to Teach Online?

Course Planning with Backward Design

What is Backward Design?
The Teaching Online Series is designed based on the principles of backward design, a very useful model for designing courses for both online and face-to-face settings. Wiggins and McTighe, in their book *Understanding by Design* (2nd Ed., 2005), describe the three steps of backward design.

1. **Identify desired results.** What should students know and be able to do at the end of the course? These are your learning outcomes.
2. **Determine acceptable evidence** that students have achieved these learning outcomes. These are your formative and summative assessments.
3. **Plan learning experiences, instruction, and resources** that will help students be able to provide evidence that they have met the learning outcomes.

Dee Fink (2013) describes the steps of backward design as making three key sets of decisions:

1. What do you want the students to learn?
2. How will students (and the teacher) know if they are learning?
3. What will the teacher and students need to do for students to learn?

Alignment (Wiggins and McTighe) or integration (Fink) of desired learning outcomes, assessments, and teaching and learning activities provides consistency for students and supports more accurate construction of course concepts.

It's about **beginning with the end in mind**. Starting with desired learning outcomes, clearly stated in measurable terms, and working backwards through assessment activities, teaching and learning activities, and content delivery. In the following video, a University of Wisconsin faculty member describes how they are using the backward design process to improve courses.

[Transcript on Educational Innovation](File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

**Prioritizing and Organizing**

Once you have a list of desired learning outcomes for your students you may see that you have more than is practical in a single class. This is quite common for outcomes related to content coverage. Fink (2013) identifies the heart of the issue as designing a "content-centered" course versus a "learning-centered" course.

A content-centered course is what everyone is used to - you were a student in them and you likely teach them as well. They start with a list of topics (not uncommonly based on textbook chapters) and work through them over the semester focusing on coverage. Alternatively, a learning-centered course begins with the answer to the question "What can and should students learn in relation to this subject?" and then move forward to organize activities, assessments, and content presentation in a way that supports that learning.

By starting from a learning-centered approach, it is easier to prioritize these content-oriented learning outcomes into three groups: the critical, the important-but-not-critical, and the nice-to-know. As you prioritize you will normally see a structure emerging that may not be in the same order or with the same emphasis as before. You will also likely see that there is not enough time to include all of the learning outcomes you have identified. Asking yourself questions like the following can help you sort and prioritize.

- What am I including so that students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills to continue in the discipline?
- What am I including only because it's in the textbook?
- What am I including in my course because it's central to the discipline, included on a licensure exam, or because I would be personally embarrassed if a student left this course not knowing these things?
- What am I including because the person who taught this course before included it?
- What am I including because it's something I'm really passionate about?

Once you have grouped and prioritized your outcomes you'll need to think about how to order them in the course. When you're doing this it's a very good time to also explicitly call out how the different concepts link together. These are the first steps to creating a course map. If you like to outline, you might find a table-style course map (doc, 17k) useful. As shown on the table, in addition to the following section on Learning Outcomes, the Assessments, Learning Activities, and Content areas will also include prompts to work on sections of your course map.

If you would like to see your course map graphically, Popplet (Links to an external site.) and Lucid Chart (Links to an external site.) provide free concept/mind-mapping tools. Below is an example using Lucid Chart to create a course map of the content for this course. A full map would also include the actual activities and assessments in context.
Writing Good Learning Outcomes

What are Learning Outcomes?

Learning outcomes guide your course design. They are the destinations on your course map. Once you know where you're going, the other questions, "How will I know when students got there?" and "What can I do to help them get there?" become much easier to answer. They are the formal statements describing what students are expected to learn in a course, whether for a classroom course or online. In short, they state where you want students to go (how they get there is the subject of later units). If you think of your course map as an actual map - outcomes are your destinations.

One of the major challenges of teaching online is that everything has to be more explicit than in a face-to-face course because the usual channels (your tone of voice, repeated vocal reminders, informal conversations before and after class) are absent. Online, learning outcomes express your expectations to your students. They are (hopefully) clear messages that help students know what you expect from them and what they should spend their time practicing and studying.

Learning outcomes focus on specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that you expect your students to learn, develop, or master (Suskie, 2004). They describe both what you want students to know AND be able to do at the end of the course. If you've not thought about learning outcomes from the perspective of what students should be able to know and do before, Angelo and Cross' Teaching Goals Inventory (Links to an external site.) may be of help.

Learning outcomes need to specify student actions that are observable and measurable. That way they can be assessed in an objective manner. "Students will appreciate the beauty of impressionist paintings" isn't an effective learning outcome because it's not measurable. On the other hand, "students can identify impressionist paintings and accurately describe criteria for classifying paintings in the impressionist style" is a learning outcome because you can observe and measure the students identifying impressionist paintings and describing criteria.

In addition to being observable and measurable, learning outcome statements have to focus on student action. They are about students showing what they have learned, not about the instructor describing how they are teaching. For example, "The students can accurately describe the process of photosynthesis" is a learning outcome while "I will show a PowerPoint presentation on photosynthesis and give the students a quiz" is not.

Usage of the terms learning outcomes and learning objectives can vary considerably depending on the author; however, for purposes of this course, you may consider them synonymous (for consistency, we will be using learning outcomes to reinforce the importance of observable behaviors).

Activity

The following Quizlet provides some potential learning outcomes. Do the following outcome statements meet the criteria of a good learning outcome: Observable, measurable, and focus on student action? Click on the card for each outcome statement to check your answers. To have the card text read to you, simply click on the card. Quizlet Transcript (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

For more information, see the Quizlet website (Links to an external site.), NOTE: The Quizlet tool is currently not accessible to assistive technology. If you choose to use it in your course please have an alternative activity in mind should it be needed. In the very least, provide a transcript with all of the information given as seen above.

How do I write good learning outcomes?
As you saw in the examples above, in their basic form, learning outcomes are typically structured as

**By the end of the course, students will be able to...**[verb] + [object].

The place where learning outcomes often fall short is the verb, **the action that students will do** to demonstrate their learning. Often instructors use “know” and “understand;” neither of which are directly observable or measurable. Instead, consider verbs that can measure knowledge and understanding. For example, will students write, identify, or analyze something? Is it enough for students to be able to list the steps in the Krebs cycle or should they be able to describe the steps of the Krebs cycle? The decisions you make now have a significant impact throughout the rest of the course design process, so it's worthwhile to wrestle with the language to find the best verb to indicate what level of knowledge or skills you think students should have.

Many faculty members start their verb search with “Bloom's Taxonomy” (which was actually written by Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl). The original taxonomy from the 1950s was revised in 2001. For information on the differences between the original and the revised version, Anderson and Krathwohl - Understanding the New Version of Bloom's Taxonomy (Links to an external site.) provides a nice description. Even though most instructors focus on the cognitive domain levels (Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create), there is a second axis to the taxonomy - the Levels of Knowledge. These include

- Factual knowledge
- Conceptual knowledge
- Procedural knowledge
- Metacognitive knowledge

Iowa State University's interactive Model of Learning Objectives (Links to an external site.) provides an interactive way to look at the intersection of the Cognitive Domain Levels and the Levels of Knowledge. If you’d like to review active verbs for learning outcomes based on Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy, Azuza Pacific University provides a list of Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy verbs (pdf, 47k). (Links to an external site.)

In 2003, Fink (2013) developed a "Taxonomy of Significant Learning" (Links to an external site.) which he used in tandem with his backward design approach. This taxonomy integrates cognitive and affective areas and adds a metacognitive component. His 6 types of significant learning are interactive but not hierarchical and would be used selectively depending on the learning outcome desired. They are:

- **Foundational Knowledge**: understanding and remembering
- **Application**: skills, critical thinking, creative thinking, practical thinking, and managing projects
- **Integration**: connecting ideas, people, and realms of life
- **Human Dimension**: learning about oneself and others
- **Caring**: developing new feelings, interests, and values
- **Learning How to Learn**: becoming a better student, inquiring about a subject, being a self-directed learner

**Learning Outcomes Generator**

Try composing some learning outcomes for your course with the Learning Outcomes Generator. The generator below uses both Bloom's cognitive taxonomy and Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning.

* Learning Outcomes Generator

**Practice Drafting Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes express your expectations to your students and are the source of the course's structure and organization.

**What are your learning outcomes?**

*This activity is a thought exercise that also allows you to see how the Blackboard Rubric tool works from a student perspective.*

Write at least 3 measurable learning outcomes for the course of your choice.

Check them against the criteria on the rubric below. If you answer "no" to any of the rubric items you should revise your learning outcome.

Write your outcomes on your course map (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article), and we will return to them in
Do we want to include this file? Learning Outcomes Rubric Transcript. (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

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<td></td>
<td>Is the outcome focused on student action?</td>
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<td>Is the outcome describing the level of performance?</td>
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Resources for Learning Outcomes & Backward Design

Additional Information

A Model of Learning Objectives: (Links to an external site.) Iowa State University - This includes a great interactive tool for exploring the different dimensions of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy. They also have the same content in a pdf handout (1.64MB). (Links to an external site.)

Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy is part of, a set of three taxonomies (Links to an external site.), developed at the same time: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. For outcomes in the affective domain, Bloom's co-author Krathwhol developed an affective taxonomy focusing on learning outcomes that include emotion which can influence motivation, interest, cooperation, and teamwork. The University of Connecticut provides a table of Krathwhol's taxonomy with related verbs (pdf, 18k). There are multiple versions of the psychomotor domain (Links to an external site.), which have been compiled for you to review and compare.

One alternative taxonomy to Bloom is Dee Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning (pdf, 360k). (Links to an external site.) This is a non-hierarchical taxonomy that focuses on the interaction of 6 dimensions of significant learning.

Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design model "Understanding by Design" (Links to an external site.) also includes a taxonomy that integrates cognitive, affective, and metacognitive components. Their Facets of Understanding are also non-hierarchical and indicate different types of understanding. The instructor would select that appropriate facets based on the desired learning outcome. Their 6 facets are:

- **Explain** concepts, principles, and processes by putting it their own words, teaching it to others, justifying their answers, and showing their reasoning.
- **Interpret** by making sense of data, text, and experience through images, analogies, stories, and models.
- **Apply** by effectively using and adapting what they know in new and complex contexts.
- **Demonstrate Perspective** by seeing the bigger picture, recognizing different points of view and offering critical analysis.
- **Empathize** by perceiving sensitively and taking alternative perspective with an honest attempt at walking in another's shoes/
- **Show Self-Knowledge** by perceiving personal styles, prejudices, projections, and habits of mind that both shape and impede their own understanding; they are aware of what they do not understand and why understanding is so hard.

Identifying Significant Learning Outcomes (Links to an external site.): Illinois State University - This offers an overview of learning outcomes for transformational learning goals.

Writing Learning Outcomes Handbook (pdf, 402k) (Links to an external site.): Texas Tech University - This guide includes how to write learning outcomes, examples of course learning outcomes, and methods for assessing learning outcomes. It also has worksheets to help you develop expected learning outcome statements and plans for assessing the expected learning outcomes.

Blackboard has a built-in Outcomes Tool that allows you to set up and track student outcomes in your course. For more information, please see the Blackboard Outcomes Instructor Guide (Links to an external site.) and your local teaching and learning center.
References


(Go back to top)
Module 2: Online Assessment - How do I know my students are learning?

Online Assessment: How do I know my students are learning?

Assessments that are aligned with your learning outcomes provide reliable feedback about student learning and reinforce to students what needs to be mastered. A balanced assessment strategy in online courses can prevent surprise grades and the drama that often accompanies them.

Learning Objectives

In this module, we discuss the "why" of aligning assessments with learning outcomes, the "what" of types of assessments to gather valid evidence that your students are learning what you intend for them to learn, and the "how" of developing assessments for online learning. At the end of this module, we hope that you will be able to:

- Differentiate between authentic and traditional assessments and between formative and summative assessments
- Identify the components of a balanced, comprehensive assessment strategy
- Create appropriate ways to assess whether students have achieved the learning outcomes for your course

Table of Contents

- Aligning and Developing Assessments
- Planning and Developing Assessments
- Practice Developing Assessments
- Online Assessment: Resources

Aligning and Developing Assessments

Why is it important to align assessments with learning outcomes?

Alignment between assessments and desired learning outcomes is foundational if your assessments are to be valid. Just like in a research study where you want to make sure that your research instrument is measuring what you want it to measure, by aligning your assessments to your learning outcomes you are making sure you are assessing what you want to assess. As we mentioned in the Course Planning with Backward Design, Biggs (2003) describes the constructive alignment of three components: (a) measurable, clearly-stated learning outcomes, (b) assessment tasks that allow students to show to what extent they have reached the learning outcomes, and (c) activities (including content and practice) that help students reach the learning outcomes. Assessments that are aligned with your learning outcomes provide dependable evidence as to how well students are reaching the desired outcomes.

Clearly aligning assessments to desired learning outcomes also reinforces to students what needs to be mastered and helps them track their progress in the course. Students pay attention to what you test. For example, if your intent is for students to be able to apply, critique, or evaluate, but your assignments and exams ask students to remember, identify, and describe, then your assessments aren't aligned with your desired learning outcomes. Asking students to describe a concept doesn't encourage them to evaluate the concept in context and doesn't provide evidence that they can evaluate the concept.

The intent of Backward Design is that assignments (and everything else) are aligned to desired learning outcomes instead of creating learning outcomes based on what you are assessing. Starting with assessments and extrapolating learning outcomes from them is the definition of "teaching to the test." This may be necessary if your course is preparing students to sit for a licensure or registry exam, but those cases are the exception more than the rule.

What does assessment look like in an online context?

Just as you can't confirm a hypothesis without testing it, so, too, you can't confirm whether your students have achieved the course learning outcomes without some form of assessment. This is why assessment is the second stage of backward design - if you know where you want students to go (learning outcomes), you next need to decide how you'll know if they've gotten there (assessment). Assessment is that evidence.

Although the types of assessments that often first come to mind are a test, paper, or lab exercise, many other activities can be used for assessment, including portfolios, discussion forums, concept maps, diagrams, and presentations. Any tangible output from a learning activity can be assessed. Your choice of output—and the activity designed to generate that output—should be determined by your learning outcomes; this is just as true in the online environment as it is in the traditional classroom.

First let's look at four qualities of assessments: Formative, Summative, Authentic, and Traditional; and how those qualities can be leveraged in different ways online. Below, we see how mixing these qualities can create a balanced, comprehensive assessment strategy that is aligned with learning outcomes for an entire course.

Formative Assessment
Online Pedagogy

Formative assessment is designed to provide feedback to both student and instructors about how well the learning process is going. Examples of formative assessment include self-tests, think-pair-share activities, and other low-risk assignments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Another option for formative assessment is to develop a larger, summative assessment and break it into smaller components that can be turned in throughout the semester. This allows you to catch and address misconceptions, challenge students’ early analyses, and provide the opportunity for them to revise and resubmit each piece in a unified whole at the end of the semester or unit.

Formative assessment options such as ungraded self-tests using the Blackboard Quizzes tool, think-pair-share activities in discussion forums or group spaces offer ways for students assess their own understanding of course concepts. If you are interested in embedding some understanding checks in your Blackboard course, try Quizlet (Links to an external site.) which can be added by going to Settings and then Apps in your course.

An often overlooked option for formative assessment is the Blackboard Self and Peer Assessment (Links to an external site.). When adequately scaffolded, peer review and critique can be a learning activity for both the student giving and the student receiving the peer review. The Assignments tool in Blackboard provides options for blind peer review, or you can set up a Discussion where students post their thoughts or explanations or examples and then provide feedback to the person posting immediately above them. Students can be split into small groups where they can share an initial draft of a paper or project, each student gives feedback to all the other group members, and then they work together to synthesize their best efforts into a group report. Using the Group spaces in Blackboard allows the instructor to see all of the initial drafts and student discussions while keeping each group separated from the other groups.

**Summative Assessment**

Summative assessment is designed to provide evidence that students have achieved a learning outcome or otherwise gained skills or knowledge throughout the course. End-of-semester exams, projects, portfolios, and presentations are often used to summatively assess students’ knowledge and skills. Courses that use a blend of summative and formative assessments provide more consistent support for learning than relying exclusively on a midterm and a final exam.

Final papers, projects, and portfolios have a variety of options in an online class. It's easy to incorporate media into Assessments, Discussions, and Content Areas - both in project instructions such as presenting a video case for analysis, and in student work such as recorded presentations, interviews, and demonstrations. A videoconferencing tool like Blackboard Collaborate can be used for synchronous assessments such as oral exams in languages. Other tools such as WebEx or MS Teams record individual video presentations or interactions such as mock counseling sessions and other role-play scenarios which students can submit to an assignment or share in a discussion.

**Authentic Assessment**

Authentic assessment asks students to demonstrate skills and knowledge by performing realistic tasks within the discipline. It provides opportunities to practice, consult resources, get feedback, and refine performances and products. Well-designed authentic assessments:

- are realistic, using real-life situations with constraints, purposes, and audiences that impact what needs to be done.
- require judgment and innovation to effectively solve unstructured problems
- assess students’ ability to use their knowledge and skills to negotiate a complex task as a whole.

Authentic assessment commonly uses strategies such as case studies, simulations, consulting (where students work with real organization to explore a problem and recommend solutions that are evaluated by both the instructor and the organizational partner), internships, and service-learning. However, depending on the discipline, authentic assessment can leverage simpler tools. For example,

- situating statistical questions in the context of fantasy sports over several weeks of a season,
- sending emails in a foreign language to request information about a travel destination and working with a small group to determine which destination would be the best vacation spot.

**Traditional Assessment**

Traditional assessment (defined mainly as discrete-item testing) tends to emphasize the development of a body of knowledge or skill. Does a student know the who, what, when, and where? Traditional assessment strategies are helpful when you want students to identify one best answer and/or target isolated skills in a concrete fashion.

Something to keep in mind is that assessment methods do not have to line up with assessment approaches. For example, multiple-choice test items can be developed to draw attention to contextual factors in an authentic case. In the same way, artificial and minimally contextualized cases can be used to identify who, what, when, and where without asking students two work with holistic, complex problems.

Online testing using the Blackboard Quizzes tool provides auto-grading and auto-feedback features with a wider range of options than blue book or scantron testing. You can provide video, audio, and images as part of a question, and students can record or upload video, audio, and images as part of their answers. You can set pre-set different feedback for different incorrect answers and even re-route students to review content area explaining the question in more depth.

However, there are also drawbacks. Many faculty express concerns about the potential for cheating in an online class. Where a faculty member might make one test and deliver it once in a proctored room for a face-to-face course, a similar fully online test may be delivered over time.

(12)
If you do use online testing features, here are some options to consider:

- Create multiple question banks for a single test - break down the questions that are delivered to students, so no one gets the exact same examination, but all are tested on similar concepts and at similar levels of difficulty.
- Randomize the order of questions to discourage cheating
- Randomize the answers and distractors to discourage cheating
- Use an honor statement at the beginning of each test, forcing the students to check "yes" or "no" that they understand the academic dishonesty policy, and they have not received assistance.
- For more options specific to the Blackboard Test tool option, please see the Blackboard Creating Tests Instructor Guide.

Planning and Developing Assessments

A Balanced Assessment Strategy

In an online course it is important for students to get frequent feedback on how they are doing. Are they learning what they are supposed to be learning? Are they achieving the learning outcomes? The most effective way to ensure that students get the feedback they need to stay on track is through a comprehensive, balanced assessment strategy that includes both formative and summative assessments.

Keep in mind that summative assessment doesn't necessarily mean "graded" nor does formative assessment necessarily mean "non-graded." For example, a mastery quiz on reference formatting may not provide a grade that counts toward the course final grade, but passing it may be required before the student can turn in a first paper. Alternatively, a first draft of a paper may count toward the final grade in the course, but the formative feedback on the draft is used to improve the final draft later in the semester.

Online courses also lend themselves to the use of automatically graded multiple-choice or short-answer "Understanding Checks." After completing one, students can receive feedback based on the answer they chose in a multiple-choice section or compare their answers to those of an expert in a short answer section. Although a grade may or may not be recorded in a grade book, such activities provide students with feedback on how well they understand course concepts. For more on setting up these types of assessment see the Blackboard Guide on the different question types. (Links to an external site.)

These sorts of frequent, low-stakes assessment opportunities where students self-test their knowledge and understanding of concepts can be very helpful, especially in situations where mastery is the desired outcome. They allow both instructors and students to catch misunderstandings and misconceptions early before other learning is built on a shaky foundation.

For more tips on online assessment you may be interested in Multiple Choice Test Ideas For College Classrooms (Links to an external site.).

What should I consider when I create assessments?

As part of a comprehensive and balanced assessment strategy, you will want to develop both formative and summative assessments. Smaller, lower-stakes assessments are good opportunities to provide formative feedback for students as they work through the course. In an online course you can structure these types of assessments in many of the same ways as you would in your face-to-face class.

In addition to your "homework" and "in-class" activities Classroom assessment techniques (Links to an external site.) (CATs) such as

- a poll or survey
- muddiest point,
- pro/con grid,
- focused paraphrasing, or
- a concept map

translate well to online tools both inside and outside your learning management system and provide opportunities for gathering formative assessment data.

As you incorporate these technologies, it's important to ensure that you're assessing more than whether or not your students remember individual facts. Many of these CATs ask students to use what they remember by applying it, evaluating it, or creating something new with it. For more on online CATs you may be interested in the white paper Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) for Online Instruction from the University of Kentucky. (Links to an external site.)

Student presentations (whether regarding cases or other projects) are another way to leverage online multimedia resources to support student learning and motivation. Students can record and share video or narrated presentations asynchronously using a tool like VoiceThread (Links to an external site.) or you can gather students together in a video conference and allow them to present live to the class.

When having students turn in papers or analyses or similar items in Assignments, having a rubric for those assignments provides students an opportunity to self-assess their work in a formative way. For more on rubrics and the Blackboard Rubrics Tool see the Rubric section in Teaching Online Module.

If you do use more traditional online testing, testing tools - such as those built into a learning management system - also allow you to create feedback that students can see after they take the test. It's sort of like an automated review. As the test creator, you have the option of when you want this automated feedback to become available. Most faculty make the feedback available only after everyone has taken the test, as a review. As soon as the students finish the test, they can see the answers and the feedback to check their own learning.

Assessments that are aligned with your learning outcomes provide reliable feedback about student learning. Clearly aligning assessments to desired learning outcomes also reinforces to students what needs to be mastered and helps them track their progress in the course.
Practice Developing Assessments

How will you assess to what extent your students have met the learning outcomes?

Describe a potential assessment to measure 1-2 of your learning outcomes.

How does your assessment meet the criteria on the rubric below? Do you need to revise your assessment or your learning outcome(s) It's not uncommon to refine learning outcomes during this process as you may find measuring your outcomes is not a clear-cut as it appears at the beginning.

Assessment Rubric Transcript (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Pts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the assessment based on observing and/or measuring student action?</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the assessments align with one or more learning outcomes?</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have an appropriate mixture of assessment types?</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Points: 3.0

Online Assessment Resources

Additional Information

A Model of Learning Objectives: (Links to an external site.) Iowa State University - This includes a great interactive tool for exploring the different dimensions of the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy. They also have the same content in a pdf handout (1.64MB). (Links to an external site.)

One alternative taxonomy to Bloom is Dee Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant Learning (pdf, 41k) (Links to an external site.). This is a non-hierarchical taxonomy that focuses on the interaction of 6 types of significant learning.

50 CATS by Angelo and Cross (pdf, 126k) (Links to an external site.), (Compiled by Cunningham and Moore)

Flint, W. Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) for Online Instruction (pdf, 44k) (Links to an external site.).

Alternative Assessment Methods for the Online Classroom (Links to an external site.). (Faculty Focus)
Active and Interactive Learning: What can my students "do" online?

Active learning is more than clicking links and buttons. Learning activities that require students to actively do something thoughtful with the concepts in your course (individually or in pairs or groups) improves learning and knowledge retention.

Learning Objectives

In this module, we will look at learning activities that require students to actively "do something" with the content and concepts and reflect on the doing (individually or in pairs or groups). By the end of this unit we hope that you will be able to:

1. identify learning activities with different types of interaction (student↔content, student↔faculty, and student↔student)
2. plan a mix of active learning activities leveraging different types of interaction to enhance your course

Table of Contents

- Online Learning Activities: Overview
- Online Learning Activities: Types of Interaction
- Online Learning Activities: Tools for Interactive Teaching and Learning
- Online Learning Activities: Thinking about Learning Activities
- Online Learning Activities: Resources for Active and Interactive Learning

Online Learning Activities: Overview

In the framework of Backwards Design, learning activities include any type of activity that students undertake to work with the concepts and skills that lead to reaching the desired learning outcomes. This means that most assessments - especially authentic assessments - are also learning activities, so much of this module will also be helpful as you think through assessments as well.

In a traditional distance education class students would receive books and workbooks in the mail, read and work independently, and mail their work back in for a grader to mark. In IU Online classes, the focus is on breaking through those individual silos and providing opportunities for students to actively learn, share, and work with their fellow classmates and the instructor.

What is Active Learning?

The concept of active learning encompasses a wide variety of learning activities in which students engage with the course content. The focus of active learning is to foster that engagement. When students sit and passively watch or listen to lectures - whether in person or on video - they are not actively engaging with the content. If you think about the difference between your engagement with the topic at hand when you are simply listening to someone report out on the topic at a committee meeting versus when you are actively debating the topic with colleagues, you can see the difference. If students are actively involved in working with the content, they will learn more, be more satisfied, and be more successful in your course.

You may have come across active learning through the Seven Principles of Undergraduate Education (pdf, 267k) (Links to an external site.). Chickering and Gamson note that students "must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves" (p. 4).

Dee Fink (2005), a leading author in active learning, suggests thinking about active learning as the intersection of three components:

- doing or observing (what Fink calls a "rich learning experience"),
- information and ideas, and
- reflective dialogue.
A "rich learning experience" is an activity that aligns with both learning outcomes and assessments and provides opportunities for students to learn new concepts and skills or to practice with concepts and skills they have recently learned. Providing "hands-on" activities for students, either individually or in small groups, is an important way to both increase motivation and support learning. Situations where students actively participate and work with the content are more effective in encouraging students to think reflectively and push their understanding of the concepts than situations where students receive information passively. Well-designed learning activities promote that kind of active learning.

An example from a Spanish class might be having students explore a local Hispanic market, observing the types of food and how it is organized, reflecting on the differences and similarities to a standard American grocery store, and connecting their reflections to course concepts about culture and its influence on shopping, cooking, and eating. In an online class, the students could share pictures or video of their exploration and their reflection with the class through a tool such as VoiceThread or in a discussion forum where they can compare and contrast their experience with those of their classmates.

Reflection and Reflective Dialogue

For Fink, the Reflective Dialogue component of active learning includes having students reflect on the meaning of their learning experience individually or with others. The reflection can take many different forms from that of a journal to a series of minute papers to a debrief conversation with a peer. The key is that they are prompted to answer questions such as:

- What am I learning?
- What is the value of what I am learning?
- How am I learning?
- What else do I need to learn?

This sort of regular, structured reflection provide opportunities for those “ah-ha” moments when connections between concepts are made, alternative perspectives are clarified, and metacognition is improved. Regular reflection also encourages students to notice how much of what they do involves and is grounded in tacit knowledge. Having them verbalize and share their understandings can turn up underlying misconceptions that can be hindering their learning without them being consciously aware of the problem.

If the concept of actively inquiring and reflecting in a cycle sound familiar, they also serve as the basis for Dewey’s Practical Inquiry Model (shown below), on which the cognitive presence aspect of the Community of Inquiry Framework is also built.

Dewey’s Practical Inquiry Model Outline (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)
Online Learning Activities: Types of Interaction

How Can Interaction Support Active Learning?

Keeping students actively engaged with you, the content, and each other promotes student success. When students are observing, doing, communicating, and reflecting, they are actively working with concepts and people. We describe these activities as interactions. Interaction is at the center of the teaching and learning process. When we move that process online, the way in which students and faculty interact changes. As we rethink how we approach interaction online there are three main types of interaction to consider. While learning activities will differ depending on the content, context, tools, and people involved, there are some strategies that can be incorporated in almost any course to foster interaction.

Student↔Faculty Interaction

Student↔faculty interaction can include both formal direct instruction and more informal mentoring and support as discussed in the Online Presence module. Regular and substantive student↔faculty interaction is required for courses to be classified as "online courses" and not "correspondence courses" by the US Department of Education (Links to an external site.) and the Higher Learning Commission (Links to an external site.). Courses considered to be correspondence are not eligible for student loans or to count toward full-time student status (Links to an external site.).

A few examples of student↔faculty interaction include

- providing feedback on assignments, learning journals, or other reflective activities
- participating in discussion forums or chats
- sending frequent announcements to summarize the previous week or describe the next week
- providing online or telephone office hours
- mentoring individual learners
- working with small groups of students assigned to help teach portions of the course (peer teaching)

Student↔Student Interaction

Interaction between students can include formal course-related collaboration and interaction as well as more informal social interaction, which can increase students' comfort with each other and with the online environment. Student↔student interaction-based activities include but are not limited to

- group projects
- group case studies
- peer instruction
- role playing
- synchronous or asynchronous discussions or debates
- collaborative brainstorming
- peer review of selected work (For more on using Blackboard tools to manage peer review, see the Peer Review section of the Instructor Guide (Links to an external site.).

Any of these examples can be used on a large or a small scale ranging from semester-long project groups doing research and presenting results to an optional live meeting where those present discuss a short video case or a discussion forum where they brainstorm alternatives to a textbook problem.

Depending on the size of your class, you can encourage student↔student interaction class-wide or in smaller groups or pairs. When working with smaller groups, it helps to emphasize individual accountability, positive interdependence, and positive interaction in grading the group's work (Kirschner, Strijbos, Kreijns, & Beers, 2004). This strategy leads to three grades on a group project emphasizing the three aspects of group work:

1. individual contribution to the group project
2. synthesis of the individual parts into a project that shows collaboration, consensus, and learning
3. working together to encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to complete the project

For more on using Blackboard to manage your student groups, please see the Group section of the Blackboard Instructor Guide. (Links to an external site.)

Student↔Content Interaction

Student↔content interaction includes students' concrete interactions with the course materials and their more abstract interactions with the concepts and ideas they present. It is more than just reading a book or watching a video. It includes but is not limited to

- tutorials (using text, still images, audio, and/or video)
- quizzes (if the feedback is useful and usable)
- web quests (a list of links for students to complete an inquiry-oriented assignment)
- reading/video discussion or reflections (Reading a textbook is technically a student↔content activity but explicitly requiring students to reflect on the reading and providing directed prompts for that reflection improves the interaction.)
- simulations

It's helpful to think through the balance of interaction over the entire course. Particularly, providing activities that offer a range of student-student interaction (from substantial to moderate to light to none) allows students with different preferences for the amount of peer interaction to be comfortable at some points and challenged to expand their comfort zone at others.

Key Elements

The keys to developing effective online learning activities are to make them:
Online Learning Activities: Tools for Interactive Teaching and Learning

It is tempting to fall into the habit of thinking that you have to use a lot of complicated online tools to provide opportunities for meaningful active learning. You can provide meaningful interaction with quite basic tools as long as they are well-structured and clearly support students in reaching learning outcomes.

Consider the Experience

While there are obviously arguments to be made in favor of some tools over others, it is more effective to first consider the experience you are trying to create for the student.

- What do you want the student to know and be able to do at the end of this activity?
- What is an appropriate and logical way to provide the student with an opportunity to practice this?
- In what ways can you add dynamic elements to the experience?
- Did you build in tools and activities that will allow all learners to participate and access the instructional material?

Consider leveraging the tools built into Blackboard such as Discussions (including recording video/audio directly into a discussion post), Group Spaces, or Collaborations. A great student learning experience can be designed within a simple environment and there is something to be said for not over-thinking or over-developing.

Other Interactive Tools

If you find that Blackboard-native tools are not sufficient to create a robust active learning experience for your students, you can explore third-party tools. When considering adding tools, please remember that while bells and whistles can deliver a better learning experience, they don't automatically deliver a better learning experience. Always ask yourself, how is this tool supporting the student's learning experience?

You'll see mention of lack of LTI support as a drawback on several tools listed. Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) is a standard that allows a sort of "plug-and-play" integration of learning tools with learning management systems. It provides standard ways of launching a 3rd-party learning tool from inside Blackboard, providing information to the learning tool about which student from which course is accessing it, and, where appropriate, allowing the learning tool to send a grade back to the Blackboard Grade Center. The main thing to remember is that tools without LTI support can't pass grades back to Blackboard so if you want to count work your students did in that tool as part of their grades you'll need to add the grades to the Gradebook. If you have a larger class, these tools may be better suited to practice activities and other ungraded exploration.

Supported by ECSU

ECSU-supported tools can be integrated with Blackboard, which is documented in ECSU's ITS Knowledge Base and ECSU's Help Desk. These tools have also been vetted by the ECSU Security Office and Data Stewards to ensure that they are securely storing and transmitting university and student data. If you plan on purchasing any software or hardware please read the following guide: Purchasing Hardware and Software (Home Use and On-Campus).

Supported Tools

- Blackboard Ally - Accessibility Tool
- Blackboard Collaborate - Video Conferencing Tool
- MS Teams - Video Conferencing Tool
- Panopto (Lecture Capture Service)

What about social media services?

Social media services such as Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter provide a wide array of tools that faculty can leverage for student activities and interactions. However, before you incorporate social media into your course, there are some things you need to consider.

1. Are you prepared to support students if they have technical issues?
2. If you want students to post publicly as part of an assignment, do you have a way for them to post under an alias or anonymously if they prefer? FERPA rules govern the release of student information to third parties, which include social media sites. For more information, see Is Your Use of Social Media FERPA Compliant?
3. Copyright and intellectual property policies may also need to be considered depending on the content of the assignment.

Please review the below links regarding FERPA and Social Media Policy at ECSU.

- ECSU's FERPA Guidelines
- ECSU's Social Media Policy
Online Learning Activities: Thinking About Learning Activities

Active learning activities build on a "rich learning experience," allow interaction around information and ideas, and an opportunity for reflective dialogue.

How active are your activities?

Review the activities in your online (or to-be-online) course and pick one that clearly aligns with your learning outcomes and that you want to revise.

1. How does it compare to the criteria in the rubric?
2. How could you revise the activity to better support learning and motivation?
3. What tools could you use to support the activity and why?
4. How can you make the activity accessible to all students?

Accessible Version of Online Learning Activities Rubric. (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>2.0 pts</th>
<th>1.0 pts</th>
<th>0.0 pts</th>
<th>Pts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the task authentic?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.0 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it include opportunities for active learning?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it allow for different types of interaction?</td>
<td>All three types</td>
<td>Two types</td>
<td>One type</td>
<td>3.0 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it hold up online work in the course?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it give the students an opportunity to get useful feedback on their work?</td>
<td>Instructor AND peer feedback</td>
<td>Instructor OR peer feedback</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.0 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it encourage students to think and reflect on what and how they are learning and its significance?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.0 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the activity accessible to all students?</td>
<td>Full Math</td>
<td>No Math</td>
<td>2.0 pts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Points: 13.0

Online Learning Activities: Resources for Active and Interactive Learning

Additional Information

- Determining the Best Technology for Your Students, Your Course, and You (Links to an external site.), - Faculty Focus article

References

- Brindley, J. E., Walti, C., & Blaschke, L. M. (2009). Creating Effective Collaborative Learning Groups in an Online Environment (Links to an external site.), The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 10(3).


Structuring Content: How can I make, find, and use online resources?

Your content provides the necessary information and tools that students need to complete activities and reach learning outcomes. While it can be easy to find and add more and more content to an online course, it's important to ensure that content actually supports your learning outcomes.

Learning Objectives

In this module, we discuss different sources for content, legal issues related to the use of others' content, and how to avoid "scope creep" in your content. By the end of this module, we hope that you will be able to:

- explain how content supports your desired learning outcomes instead of leading the course, and
- begin to curate your own content and content from other sources based on your outcomes, assessments, and learners' prior knowledge.

Table of Contents

- Gathering, Making, and Structuring Content
- Legally Reusing Content
- Exploring New Content Sources
- Organizing Foundational and Supporting Content
- Content: Resources

Gathering, Making, and Structuring Content

As you design your course based on your desired learning outcomes, it is important to think through what parts of your content are critical to support student achievement of those outcomes and what parts are less critical. By continuing the process of backward design, the foundational content should directly support students as they complete activities and assessments. Content that doesn't directly support activities and assessments (which were developed to provide practice and show mastery of learning outcomes) is supplemental content and would be prioritized behind foundational content. Supplemental content can include additional in-depth materials for advanced students, related inter-disciplinary content, or review of basic knowledge and skills for students without the prerequisite abilities for the course.

Is it more than just a reading list?

In your face-to-face course, content includes not only your textbook(s) and other reading materials but also material you present in class and any publisher-provided resources such as videos or interactive tools. In your online course, the same range of content is important to make your course engaging and to motivate your students to learn what is needed to meet the desired learning outcomes.

When you described your desired learning outcomes for the course, you began to make a road map for your content. When you developed your assessments and practice activities, you filled in more spaces on that map. Now you can look at the map you have created and see what content is needed to fill in the remaining spaces and support student success.

Focusing the Content

One of the keys to supporting student learning is to carefully define the scope of each module, unit, or learning event. You will often have more content than can or should be included given the desired outcomes and the amount of time available. To keep the scope of the content manageable, it helps to clearly describe the prerequisite knowledge students need.

By returning to the question "What do the learners need to do?" and the related question of "Is this content necessary for the learners to be able to do what they need to do?" you can avoid information overload.

Avoiding information overload can be difficult, especially in an online environment where it's often easy to keep adding resources through links to other websites or documents. You may hear instructional designers talk about "chunking" content, a term from cognitive information processing which emphasizes that the average human being can hold only so much information in short-term memory before it either "falls out" or gets pushed into long-term memory. Chunked instruction is designed to limit the amount of information presented at any given time to an amount that learners can handle in short-term memory, process, and integrate into long-term memory. A good chunk is something that can be understood as a whole; it should be able to stand alone but also link to other chunks. This paragraph is a good example of a chunk.

Instructional Resources

Online Pedagogy
Because instructional resources come in a variety of media and because there are so many ways to present content, the selection or creation of content-rich resources can be overwhelming. The question of creating your own resources or using existing ones (or a mix of both) can also be a challenging decision. Whichever route you decide to take, the most important thing to provide a variety of resource types. Even if your assessment is a written exam, you can still provide content in multiple formats, including print, but also images, interactive tutorials, audio, and/or video.

Keep in mind that content resources are a means to the end of learning and not an end unto themselves. If your beautifully crafted PowerPoint presentation isn't helping learners learn the material, try adding a video, a diagram with audio, and/or a live chat with you or another professional in the field. And don't be surprised if some learners love video while others prefer a PowerPoint presentation, and still others will only want a PDF of the presentation with the text of the narration. Learners are different, which underscores the importance of offering multiple resources. The more options you have, the more likely learners will find something that will engage them.

It is also important to provide various perspectives on the content if possible. This is especially true if you're working with ill-structured problems (Links to an external site.) such as simulations or case studies. Problem-based learning offers rich opportunities for discussion and debate when learners can see multiple perspectives on the situation. For example, a simulation where learners take roles and make decisions about a business venture would be well supported with resources showing the perspectives of an accountant, a marketing manager, a sales manager, a production manager, a representative from the support staff, a representative from the manufacturing staff, a representative from legal counsel, and an information technology consultant. These resources would highlight differences in priorities, values, and outcomes that learners see in the real world. These kinds of resources would also be valuable when an individual learner is independently working through a case study.

Producing your own content

Audio and Video

While it may be tempting to simply record yourself lecturing for an hour and post the videos for your online class, research shows that this is not an effective strategy. Traditional-aged students tend to engage with video more than adult students; however, studies show that shorter video is the key to getting any students to watch. One study found that a 6 minute video is optimum for student engagement (Links to an external site.). The average YouTube video is around 4 minutes, and analytics show that viewing still drops off significantly around halfway through on these short segments. Even TED Talks (Links to an external site.), tend to stay under 15 minutes. While there is no definitive research showing increased learning from shorter videos, if the students don't watch the video, they can't learn from it. While you may be convinced that your students are different, it is a good idea to start out with a solid mix of content types and review the analytics from your videos before deciding to go all in. Plus, it is easier to re-record a short video than a long one when you need to update content. Making Your Own Videos in the Multimedia Module goes into more detail if you are interested in recording your own video.

Many faculty have PowerPoint presentations that guide students through a review of the key points in the written material. If you are considering taking those PowerPoint files as you are and recording audio over them, there are a few caveats regarding this strategy for online classes. If you are using audio presentations with slides, please review the Guidelines and Best Practices for using PowerPoint in Online Classes (pdf, 1.62MB). (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article) Presentations and Interactive Media in the Multimedia Module provides more information and sampling of tools you can use to create regular and interactive presentations.

Though podcasts have waned in popularity over the past years, some faculty prefer to talk to their students through audio only in a podcast/audiobook style. If your video or presentation has no important visual elements, an audio-only version can be a good option, especially for students who prefer to listen while they commute, exercise, or other activities that don't allow for full visual attention. You don't need to create the next Stuff You Should Know (Links to an external site.) or Radiolab (Links to an external site.) to be successful but scripting and eliminating audio distractions such as ums and uhhs, unconscious tapping, or loud computer fans can help keep listeners from becoming distracted and losing the train of thought you are trying to convey.

Text

If you're not a fan of video, it's easy to fall back on printed resources such as textbooks and lecture notes when you start to design an online class. However, keep in mind that in your face-to-face classes you explain and expand on the printed material your students read to help them understand difficult concepts and focus their study. The printed material used in a face-to-face class will never be sufficient for an online class by themselves. If they were, why would anyone come to class? The students need you to further explain, expound, answer questions, and give examples. That said, don't feel like you have to write the next great treatise on your subject. If you have a good variety of content sources using a mix of media the need for additional written resources may be smaller than you think.

Looking at the materials you are planning to provide to your students, where are the gaps? If you have taught this class before you'll know where students commonly have difficulty. It may be a matter of providing bridging explanations, additional examples, a Frequently Asked Questions content area, or a glossary of terms they struggle with. When you write for students to read it is best to write in a conversational tone, not like you are writing a journal article. This can be difficult at first but it's really all right to use first and second-person pronouns. Also, running your writing through a Readability Checker (Links to an external site.) is very helpful to catch prose that you think is fine - because it's fine for you to read - but is actually at a higher level than your students' reading ability.

For example, the previous two paragraphs have a Flesch-Kincaid reading ease score of 62 which is good, about the level of a BBC website. However, the Gunning-Fog score (which weighs things a bit differently) is higher at 12, which is about the level of the Harvard Law Review.

Legally Reusing Content

Almost everything falls under copyright law. Whether there is a copyright notice on it or not, you should presume it is copyrighted until you have evidence otherwise. So how do you tell if you can use a document, video, image or audio clip in your class legally?

Can I legally reuse other people's content, graphics, and audio?
If you are embedding media (for example, embedding a YouTube or Panopto video into your course like the Creative Commons one below) or if you are linking to an outside source (like the link below to Columbia University), that is not affected by copyright. You are merely pointing students to the original source of the work, not duplicating or redistributing the work in any way. If you are not embedding from or linking to an outside source, there are three main allowances for use without requesting permission (and potentially paying a fee) to the copyright holder: public domain, Creative Commons, and fair use.

**Public Domain**

Copyright does not apply to works in the public domain: this includes general facts, words, ideas, names, short phrases (that are not trademarked slogans), method, content written or produced by the US government, and works old enough that copyright has expired. For more information on public domain works, please see the [Columbia University copyright site](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/columbia/copyright/).

**Creative Commons**

If the copyright holder has chosen Creative Commons (CC) licensing you may use the work based on the CC terms. Creative Commons and other Open Access publishing options allow copyright holders the ability to allow reuse of their works but still retain some rights under US law. For more on Creative Commons licensing, please see the following video.

Transcript of Creative Commons Kiwi (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Credit for Video: Creative Commons Kiwi (Links to an external site.) by Creative Commons Aotearoa New Zealand (Links to an external site.) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand (Links to an external site.) (CC BY) license.

**Fair Use**

If you are using a small amount of a larger work, using it in a limited way, and controlling who can access the work, you may be able to use it under Fair Use guidelines. Fair Use means using a copyrighted work for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include—the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes; the nature of the copyrighted work; the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. (17 USC Section 107 (Links to an external site.))

To check if your planned use leans toward Fair Use ~ try the Fair Use Checklist.

**What about Images from the Internet?**

One thing to keep in mind is that images are not a special case. Everything on the internet should be presumed to be fully protected by copyright law - including images - unless it specifically states otherwise. There are many images that are freely available to use with or without attribution through public domain or Creative Commons licenses but they're not necessarily easy to find. MorgueFile and Pixabay are good sources of images that do not need attribution. The Compfight (Links to an external site.) has a mix of images that do and do not require attribution. Compfight (Links to an external site.) is a Flickr search tool that pulls Creative Commons licensed images that you can use with attribution.

**Filtered Google Image Search**

When using Google Image Search, you can filter by usage rights and select label for noncommercial reuse.
Non-Filtered Google Image Search

What you commonly see on a non-filtered Google image search is a large number of stock photos that other people have paid for and placed on their website. For example, the surprised girl in this [Medical News Today article](Links to an external site.) is for sale from the [iStockphoto](Links to an external site.) repository. You can tell that it looks like a commercial stock photo and using [TinEye reverse image search](Links to an external site.) it pulls right up as a commercial photo for sale. Commercial stock photos are never going to fall under fair use because if you use it without paying for it that explicitly replaces the sale of the copyrighted work, and there is a reasonably available licensing mechanism for use of the copyrighted work. If it is still a bit fuzzy, think of a picture you want to use in your course and walk through the following flow chart. (Click on the image to see full size. Image not accessible to screen readers.)

For more information regarding Copyright, please check out the [ECSU ITS Knowledge Base](Links to an external site.) and [J. Eugene Smith Library’s Copyright, Fair Use, and Application](Links to an external site.).

Exploring New Content Sources

Finding additional content

It is usually easier to adapt or use existing materials than it is to design your own materials from scratch. Here are some repositories that may provide media or course materials that you can use in your course. Please keep in mind that just because something is on the internet that does not mean that it is free to use without attribution. **Always verify the use of requirements** for anything you find online.

Video Repositories

- [Australian Screen](Links to an external site.) contains information about and excerpts from a wide selection of Australian feature films, documentaries, television programs, newsreels, short films, animations, and home-movies produced over the last 100 years.
- [BigThink](Links to an external site.) offers interviews and insight from the world’s most influential experts in business, entertainment, education, religion, and media.
- [Bloggingheads.tv](Links to an external site.) offers split-screen video dialogues about politics and ideas.
- [Crash Course Videos](Links to an external site.) are made by the author [John Green](Links to an external site.), his brother Hank, and other subject matter experts. All videos in the series are free to use and licensed with a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license](Links to an external site.) but you can support them if you like through Paetron.
- [Folkstreams.net](Links to an external site.) has videos related to American roots culture.
- [EUscreen](Links to an external site.) offers free online access to videos, stills, texts and audio from European broadcasters and audiovisual archives from the early 1900s to the present.
- The [Global Oneness Project](Links to an external site.) produces documentary films and interviews that explore ecological, economical, and social systems.
- [LinkTV](Links to an external site.) gathers global and national news, documentaries, and cultural programs.
Online Pedagogy

Review your learning outcomes on your Course Map and consider the following questions.

What do your students need to meet the learning outcomes?

1. What content do students need to know to successfully meet this learning outcome based on the assessments you have developed? (Differentiating between what they need to know - foundational knowledge and skills - and what would be nice for them to know - supplemental knowledge and skills - is the first step in prioritizing content development.)

2. What types of content will students use to learn what they need to know? (Are you leveraging multiple types of content?)

Image Repositories

- ARTStor hosts a digital library of nearly one million images in the areas of art, architecture, the humanities, and social sciences with a set of tools to view, present, and manage images for research and pedagogical purposes. Contact your campus library for free access.
- Compfight is a Flickr search engine that lets you easily search for images licensed for reuse, attribution usually required.
- Everystockphoto is a search engine for free photos.
- Flickr Creative Commons lets you find images that Flickr users have chosen to offer under a Creative Commons license.
- iStock Photo, by Getty Images, has millions of high-quality royalty-free photos, illustrations, videos, and audio files available for a small fee.
- Morguefile is a free archive of images shared by photographers which can be used without attribution.
- Openclipart is a repository of free clip art.
- PDPhoto is a database of public domain photos.
- Pirabay provides high-resolution images free for use without attribution.
- Stockvaultnet provides high-quality stock photos that photographers and designers share for free.
- StockXCHNG has free stock photos, attribution required.
- Wikimedia Commons offers freely usable images, audio, and videos, attribution required.

Audio Repositories

- ccMixter is a community music site featuring remixes licensed under Creative Commons.
- Freesound is a collaborative database of Creative Commons licensed sounds (not songs).
- PartnersInRhyme offers music across many genres for a small fee. It also has free and paid music and sound effects.
- SoundSnap has free and paid sound effects and loops recorded by users.
- UbuWeb's sound page has music by avant-garde artists.
- FreePlay is a music library. Freeplay Music allows free educational use. See point 5.(b) (2) in their terms of use. You can search for different styles and "feels".

Course Material Repositories

- Academic Earth offers college-level online courses and videos.
- The Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative offers open online courses.
- Connexions offers free modules that you can incorporate into other materials.
- The Internet Archive provides free access to its digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form.
- Khan Academy has online video courses on a number of subjects.
- MIT Open Courseware (OCW) provides free lecture notes, exams, and videos from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) has a searchable collection of free peer-reviewed online instructional materials.
- The Open Courseware Consortium has open online courses from around the world.
- Open Yale Courses provides free access to introductory courses taught by Yale faculty.
- The World Digital Library offers, free of charge and in multilingual format, primary materials from countries and cultures around the world.

Organizing Foundational and Supporting Content

Curating content, whether it is developed by you or from publishers or shared by others on the web, is important to help students be able to prioritize their work. When you have a finite amount of time, everything can't be equally important.

What do your students need to meet the learning outcomes?

Review your learning outcomes on your Course Map and consider the following questions.

1. What content do students need to know to successfully meet this learning outcome based on the assessments you have developed? (Differentiating between what they need to know - foundational knowledge and skills - and what would be nice for them to know - supplemental knowledge and skills - is the first step in prioritizing content development.)

2. What types of content will students use to learn what they need to know? (Are you leveraging multiple types of content?)
3. Does the content have interaction built-in? If not, how could you add interaction through an activity for an assignment?
4. Is the content accessible for students with disabilities? If not, what sort of accommodation will you need to make?
5. Is it legal by copyright to use?

Content: Resources

Additional Information

- Creative Commons (Links to an external site.)
- Columbia University Copyright Advisory Office (Links to an external site.)

References

- Romanov, K., & Nevgi, A. (2007). Do medical students watch video clips in e-learning and do these facilitate learning? (Links to an external site.) Medical Teacher, 29, 490-494.
A well-organized course provides a clear path for students to progress. By providing structure and clear, welcoming instructions and information, students will be more comfortable and confident and will ask fewer logistical questions.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, we hope you will be able to:

- organize your course using folders
- use the course entry point for the home page and/or a "Getting Started with the Course" content area to welcome and orient your students
- write a readable, accessible syllabus that includes the information necessary for online students

Table of Contents

- Structuring your Online Course
- Structuring the Course: Communicating Your Plan and Intentions
- Structuring the Course: Organizing the Syllabi for Online Courses
- Structuring the Course: Writing a Good Syllabus
- Structuring the Course: Resources for Building the Course

Structuring Your Online Course

How do I put this all together?

If you're at the putting it together stage we're going to presume you already have the following:

- Clear and measurable learning outcomes
- Assessments that can show to what extent your students have met the learning outcomes
- Activities and other active learning strategies to allow students to practice doing what you describe in the learning outcomes
- Content that provides sufficient information, explanation, and demonstration, in both written and visual form, for students to successfully reach the learning outcomes

Consistency is the key

While there are many different ways to organize your course, once you choose your strategy the best thing you can do for your students is to implement it as consistently as possible. Like in-person students who get in the habit of going to class at the same time and the same place every week, online students need to form those same habits to maintain consistent performance across the semester. Making sure that assignments are always due on the same day of the week and the folders always begin on the same day of the week goes a long way to providing structure.

Students also benefit from consistently having an overview of each folder describing what they are to do and learn. By placing an overview (either written or on video) at the beginning of each folder as an advance organizer, students are better prepared to complete it. The overview should also include a list of reading (identifying chapters from books or linking to digital resources) and brief assignment descriptions or links to Assignments, Discussions, or Quizzes where the full descriptions are. Some faculty members like to put the overview description or video on one content area and then readings and resources on a subsequent content area and then have assignments and activities follow individually in the folder. Either way is good as long as you pick one approach and use it consistently.

Even if you are working from a strong constructivist frame, when putting your course together make sure to keep in mind the scaffolding provided by the three phases of direct instruction (Links to an external site):

- **I Do**: How are you modeling and explaining new material and the ways in which new material connects to previous concepts? See the Multimedia module for ideas on presenting these think-alouds and walkthroughs.
- **We Do**: How are you guiding and coaching the learning process? Providing prompt and actionable feedback is one way but preemptive checks on understanding and formative feedback can help support learners before misunderstandings are documented in assignments.
- **You Do**: How are you providing independent practice? Keep in mind, independent doesn't have to mean alone. Group work can provide collaborative practice independent of the instructor.

The long and the short of a Folder

In Blackboard, you can make course organization and navigation easier for yourself and your students. It is the place where you organize your activities, content, and assessments in the order in which you want your students to progress through them. Having all instructions, content, activities,
and assignments in folders avoids the problem of telling students to "go there and do this" and then "go somewhere else and do that".

A very important benefit of the folders is that, by organizing all your content, assignments, quizzes/tests, discussions, etc. in folders, you can hide the Assignments, Quizzes, Discussions, and Files from student view. This gives students one and only one place to look for everything. That means fewer "where is _____?" questions for you and less frustration for your students.

The more doors students have to the same items, the more confusing it is for them and the harder it is to be sure they are in the right place. This is because in Blackboard, all of the other tools organize these items differently than you do in folders.

There are two schools of thought about how to organize items in folders: the long version where every item is a separate part in the folders including links and readings as well as activities and assignments and; the short version where each folder contains an overview Content Item that includes a list of the books or chapters for the topic as well as links to other items the students are to read, watch, and explore.

Short Version:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module 1 Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview:</strong> Welcome to Week 1 of the course. This week we will explore the many reasons for interpersonal violence. We will examine fear of violent crime, contributing factors to reported and unreported crimes, as well as, risk factors such as family backgrounds, personal characteristics and socioeconomic status of the offenders and victims. Students will also be introduced to the various responses to victims and trends in victims' rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Objectives (LO):</strong> STANDARDS 1.1 - 1.3 - Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LO 1: The student will be able to compare and contrast the theories of violence and victimization with applied responses to victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LO 2: The student will be able to analyze modern problems and trends in victims' rights in the criminal justice system and various institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LO 3: The student will be able to evaluate how victim advocacy programs operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LO 4: The student will be able to evaluate their understanding and measurement of violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module Resources Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Read Chapter 1 (Pages 1-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Review Lecture PowerPoint (PPT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- View: Institutionalized - Mental Health Behind Bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- View: 30 Years - Restoring the Balance of Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due This Week Folder: STANDARDS 1.1 - 1.3 - Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Discussion Topic 1 - Unreported Crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- LO 1: The student will be able to compare and contrast the theories of violence and victimization with applied responses to victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Module 1 - Assignment 1: Reasons for Interpersonal Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- LO 2: The student will be able to analyze modern problems and trends in victims' rights in the criminal justice system and various institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- LO 3: The student will be able to evaluate how victim advocacy programs operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Module 1 - Weekly Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- LO 4: The student will be able to evaluate their understanding and measurement of violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Your Information (FYI):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Prepare to select your essay topic by Week 3 of the semester.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Long Version:
Module 1 Framework
Overview:
Welcome to Week 1 of the course. This week we will explore the many reasons for interpersonal violence. We will examine fear of violent crime, contributing factors to reported and unreported crimes, as well as, risk factors such as family backgrounds, personal characteristics and socioeconomic status of the offenders and victims. Students will also be introduced to the various responses to victims and trends in victims’ rights.

Learning Objectives (LO): STANDARDS 1.1 - 1.3 - Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric
- LO 1: The student will be able to compare and contrast the theories of violence and victimization with applied responses to victims.
- LO 2: The student will be able to analyze modern problems and trends in victims’ rights in the criminal justice system and various institutions.
- LO 3: The student will be able to evaluate how victim advocacy programs operate.
- LO 6: The student will be able to evaluate their understanding and measurement of violence.

Module Resources Folder:
- Read Chapter 1 (Pages 1-10)
- Review Lecture PowerPoint (PPT)
- Watch Institutionalized - Mental Health Behind Bars
- Watch 30 Years - Restoring the Balance of Justice

Due This Week Folder: STANDARDS 1.1 - 1.3 - Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric
- Discussion Topic 1 - Unreported Crimes
  - LO 1: The student will be able to compare and contrast the theories of violence and victimization with applied responses to victims.
- Module 1 - Assignment 1: Reasons for Intercourse Speciation
  - LO 2: The student will be able to analyze modern problems and trends in victims’ rights in the criminal justice system and various institutions.
  - LO 3: The student will be able to evaluate how victim advocacy programs operate.
- Module 1 - Weekly Reflection
  - LO 4: The student will be able to evaluate their understanding and measurement of violence.

For Your Information (FYI):
- Prepare to select your essay topic by Week 3 of the semester.

Module 1 PPT Lecture

Video: Institutionalized: Mental Health Behind Bars
Watch the following video to complete Module 1 - Assignment 1.

Video: 30 Years: Restoring the Balance of Justice
Watch the following video to complete Module 1 - Assignment 1.

Module 1 - Discussion 1: Unreported Crimes (option 1)
Why do victims only report some crimes to the police? Identify at least two examples, in the media, of recent cases where there were ramifications of reporting the crimes to the police. In your opinion, is the fear of reporting crimes to the police justified? Why or why not?

Reply to at least two classmates’ discussion posts and explain whether you agree or disagree with their point of view, make sure to provide resources to back up why you agree or disagree.

Requirements:
- The first post is due on Wednesday of this week.
- You will need to post before being able to reply to your peers.
- The replies to two classmates are due by Sunday of this week.
- Follow the Discussion Board Rubric to earn full credit.
- Please refer to the Course Policies for appropriate responses to your classmates’ opinions.
- LO 1: Compare and contrast the theories of violence and victimization with applied responses to victims.

Discussion Board (option 2)
Complete Module 1 - Discussion 1: Unreported Crimes

Module 1 - Journal Reflection
Based on the resources provided in the Module Resources Folder, evaluate the topics covered in Module 1. Share your understanding and measurement of violence. Also, please provide a resource and/or a news story that would be beneficial for the course regarding victims’ rights and the reason you chose for sharing the resource and/or news story.

Requirement:
- Write between 350-450 words.

As you can see, making each item separate elements can significantly increase the length of the content and the long version can appear overwhelming to students and reduce motivation. On the other hand, instructors are concerned that students skip over readings and don’t explore links unless they are required to progress through them one at a time.
Structuring the Course: Communicating Your Plan and Intentions

Getting Started with the Course

For a student, the beginning of a new semester can be both exciting to start fresh and frightening to not know what you’re getting yourself into. Students who haven’t taken an online course before can be overwhelmed going into a course site with no direction or explanation. Even if they have taken an online course before, there is no way of knowing how their previous instructor organized that course and what the student’s experience of that course was. Therefore, it’s still important to provide sufficient instructions, additional information, and begin to calibrate student expectations of the course by modeling appropriate behavior.

Using the entry point (home page)

When students log in to your course for the first time they need to see something that orients them to where they are and explicitly communicates what they are to do in a friendly and welcoming manner. Even though you have several options for the course home page, it is always recommended to set your course home page to the announcements tool that you have created. Starting new students on a syllabus at the home page or a week/module list isn’t nearly as welcoming as a home page with important course announcements that can include your contact information, a picture of you, a personal welcome, and instructions on what to do first.

It would be best if the course home page were set to the announcements tool in your Blackboard course.

- Blackboard Announcements Tool

Since your students come to your class with a wide variety of previous online learning experiences and expectations, communicating your expectations for your students from the beginning is a good way to set the tone for the course and course communication. Some faculty prefer to write out course expectations and only do a personal introduction video. Other faculty members like to do a brief video providing an overview of the course like the one below and post it on the home page or on a separate “Getting Started with the Course” content area. Here are two examples of different points in the production quality and creativity range.

Transcript - Example Course Introduction: Environmental Public Health (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Transcript for Zombie Infections Course (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)
Using a "Getting Started with the Course" Content Area

A Welcome Content Area called something along the lines of "Getting Started with the Course." In addition to those topics, there are a few other examples of items that could go on that home page as well. Here are some sections you can take, paste into your course, and customize.

* **Netiquette:**

One thing to always keep in mind when taking any online course is that the others with which you interact throughout the semester - including me, your instructor - are human beings. The first rule of netiquette (Links to an external site.) is to "remember the human" when you are communicating with me or with your peers. The second rule is to "adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life." It's not likely that students would yell at, mock, or belittle another student in a face-to-face class but the feelings of anonymity that some people have when they are online can lead to those sorts of behaviors. Clearly stating that they are not acceptable in an online class may seem unnecessary but stating it upfront and linking it to the Student Code of Conduct can provide a more direct route to correct.

Please take a few minutes and review all the Core Rules of Netiquette (Links to an external site.) and make sure you have a profile picture added to Blackboard (instructions on Uploading a Blackboard Avatar) before beginning the class.

* **Course Structure:**

This online course is divided into X Weeks/Modules as listed in the Syllabus.

Each Week/Module is X weeks long. They normally include:

1. material for you to read, watch, and explore;
2. an activity such as a discussion where you interact with your classmates in a small group, and
3. a graded assignment to allow you to work with the concepts and resources (sometimes individually, sometimes together).

If the content areas are not all visible at the beginning of the semester state that they are not available and when new content will be released (at least two weeks in advance of the week/module start date).

* **Feedback Expectations:**

I will aim to provide you with feedback on each assignment within X days. Make sure to check your instructor feedback when you receive a notification that something has been graded.

If you are using videoconferencing at any point in the class it's a good idea to include asynchronous video orientation in the first two weeks. It gives students a chance to test out their video equipment and gives you an opportunity to address any questions or concerns they might have. If you would rather not have a synchronous orientation, having students post a video introduction of themselves also provides proof of their video conferencing ability.

In addition to the course entry point and a getting started content area, you also communicate your plan and intentions in your syllabus, which we will be thinking about on the next page.

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**Structuring the Course: Organizing Syllabi for Online Courses**

**Syllabus Basics**

A syllabus is both a map of your course and an agreement between you and your students. It's a resource that you will likely refer students to throughout the course. Having an organized, approachable, and accessible syllabus helps to set a positive tone for the course and support students' confidence in you as the instructor. According to backward design, writing the syllabus is one of the last things you do because, until you have worked through your outcomes, assessments, activities, and content, you wouldn't have the information that you need to write one. You are basically translating your course map into a syllabus at the end. If you made a visual course map you may want to include that in your syllabus as well.
What is different about a syllabus for an online class?

An online course syllabus is generally similar to a well-structured traditional syllabus in many ways. The differences center on the need for it to be very clearly written, well organized, readable, and complete. Unless you are doing an in-person or synchronous video orientation there won't be easy opportunities to talk through confusing points or clarify instructions or explanations. The syllabus needs to convey the necessary information in a way that students can understand.

Research into syllabus construction and the influence of the syllabus on student motivation and retention has influenced growing popularity of a learning-centered syllabus (in contrast to a coverage-centered syllabus). This also reflects the Significant Learning process by Fink (Links to an external site.) as we mentioned in the Outcomes Module. This is an especially useful form for online students who may have no interaction with an instructor in the first few weeks of class. While still containing much of the standard information, a learning-centered syllabus also communicates enthusiasm, mutual accountability, and a belief in students' learning potential, as well as respectfully socializing them to the roles and norms of the class (Habanek, 2005; Sulik & Keys, 2014).

Palmer, Bach, and Streifer (2014) developed and validated a rubric for learning-focused syllabi review (Links to an external site.), reflecting the importance of learning outcomes and alignment as well as Fink's Significant Learning taxonomy. Their rubric criteria include items such as:

- well organized and easy to navigate
- a positive, respectful, and inviting tone
- directly addresses the student as a competent, engaged learner
- indicates a learning environment that fosters positive motivation (see teaching approach section below)
- clearly communicates high expectations and projects confidence that students can meet them through hard work

Expectations and Responsibilities

As noted in the rubric, in an online course it is important to define expectations and responsibilities up front as much as possible. Online there are fewer opportunities for peer pressure to encourage disengaged students to participate. Making sure participation expectations, as well as other expectations such as writing quality, citation format, etc., is quite helpful to both your students and to you as the semester progresses. While spelling out these sorts of expectations in the syllabus may seem odd at first, you will appreciate taking the time to do so and doing so in a positive, encouraging manner - as you refer students back to that pre-written section.

Complete Syllabus

Having a complete syllabus at the beginning of the course is often much more important for online students than for on-campus students. On-campus students who physically see you every week tend to have a higher tolerance for ambiguity so it is easier for instructors to make decisions about the course as they go along. Changing the focus of a week, swapping out an assignment, replacing readings and resources are all easier for students to manage in an on-campus course. Online students who are balancing schoolwork with jobs and families are less amenable to change and lack of evidence of clear planning tends to make them anxious when they don't feel a personal connection with the instructor. Lack of visible proof that the course is fully planned can be unsettling - especially to online students that have had the experience of being in a course that was only built a week or two in advance.

Sections of an online course syllabus

As you have seen over your time as a student and an instructor, there are some standard items that are on most syllabi (Links to an external site.). Instructor contact information, required textbooks, course grading scale, and university, school, and department policies are almost universally included. Other sections recommended to make your syllabus complete, and sufficiently detailed include:

- measurable learning outcomes which are then referenced throughout the course
- brief week/module descriptions - these are especially important if your week/modules are not all open to students at the beginning of the semester
- technology requirements such as needing a headset with microphone, a webcam, or specialized software, if applicable
- a clear statement about types of academic misconduct, their consequences, and the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct.

On the other hand, there are also some sections you may include on your on-campus syllabus that are not needed in an online class because there are other places where they should be. For example, some instructors automatically put a section in the syllabus for detailed assignment instructions because in the on-campus class the syllabus may be the only piece of paper students keep. In an online class, the detailed assignment instructions should be kept with the Blackboard Assignment, Discussion, or Quiz and only a brief overview of the assignments needs to go in the syllabus.

Faculty also often write up a schedule and include it as part of the syllabus. In Blackboard, as you put due dates in published Assignments, Discussions, and Quizzes, they are automatically added to both the course Calendar and at the bottom of the Syllabus Tool. When you change a date in one place it is automatically updated everywhere else in the course where you would have entered it in a due date field. Wherever you type a due date in a text box or a document, if you change it you have to manually find every instance where you typed it in and change it yourself. By using these automatic schedule tools you know everything will be consistent and students will not see different due dates for the same assignment.

Other important items to pay attention to in a syllabus for an online course include:

- When and how are you available to your students: Many instructors find that holding online open office hours is less effective than asking students to request a meeting and finding a mutually acceptable time. It's also helpful to have options for how to meet that include both phone and video. Providing more than one option for contacting you, as well as stating how quickly you will respond to requests for a meeting provides a signal to students that you are accessible to them should they have a question or a concern.
- How the time zone of the course affects deadlines and other communication: If your assignments are due at midnight students need to understand that if means only midnight in the eastern time zone and 11pm or 10pm earlier in their time zone or if it means midnight in their respective time zone. Clarifying time zones for synchronous activities is also critical as time differences are not something most people think about on a regular basis.
How the course progresses through the semester: Many students come to online courses with the expectation that it will work like a correspondence course - they can do what they want, when they want. The fact that there are deadlines, interaction, and potentially, group work involved can be a surprise. Making sure they understand the pace of the course from the beginning helps to set realistic expectations for student participation. If you have 1-week/module with more than one regularly occurring due date (for example, initial discussion posts are due every Friday and quizzes are due every Sunday) it is critical for them to understand the pace and rhythm in that first week.

Important Sections for Student Support

There are also some specific sections that should be included on every syllabus that you may not automatically add.

- Disability Accommodations
- Technology Support
- Academic and Student Support

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities (e.g. mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision, neurological, etc.) You must have established your eligibility for support services through the appropriate office that services students with disabilities. Note that services are confidential, may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. Captions and alternate media for print materials may take three or more weeks to get produced. Please contact your campus adaptive educational services office as soon as possible if accommodations are needed.

Technology Accessibility Information

For accessibility information for persons using adaptive technology with Blackboard, please visit Blackboard Product Accessibility.

For each external tool you are using you also need to provide a link to the accessibility information for that tool.

Provide detailed information on contacting your technology support services including their hours, phone numbers, email, and if they have it, live chat information.

The Academic Support and Student Support sections are recommend in cases where these services are realistically accessible and useful to online students. Availability of online academic support on each campus will vary. If your campus only provides some support service to on-campus students it can be helpful to let these offices and centers know that you have online students with additional needs for support services.

The following are suggested items to include in each section that you would customize to your campus.

Academic Support Services

Here you would list any academic support services available to online students on your campus including how to contact the offices providing the service. If there is a specific person they need to ask for please include that information as well.

Student Support Services

Here you would list any student support services available to online students on your campus including how to contact the offices providing the service. If there is a specific person they need to ask for please include that information as well. These services can include campus-wide services such as:

- Dean of Students office
- Ombudsperson
- Academic and Career Advising
- Mental health services including coping with academic anxiety
- Policies regarding attendance, withdrawals, conduct, and religious holidays

And also any student services contact information for your school or program.

Structuring the Course: Writing a Good Syllabus

What About a Graphic Syllabus?

You may have heard of Linda Nilson’s book The Graphic Syllabus and the Outcomes Map (Links to an external site.) which recommends supplementing a text-based syllabus with graphics showing the structure and organization of the course and its learning outcomes. Providing a graphic organizer is also recommended as a good practice in Universal Design for Learning (Links to an external site.) , as a method for visualizing the connections between the outcomes and the course content, activities, and assessments. Clearly aligning outcomes with assessments, activities, and content are critical standards in Quality Matters and it is easy to show that alignment through a diagram, infographic, or flowchart. Keep in mind that images should not replace listing the outcomes and weeks/modules in text - they provide an alternative way of seeing the structure of the course.

The course map from Course Planning with Backward Design is an example of an organizational graphic that you could share with your students.
If you are thinking about creating an infographic-style syllabus, it is a good idea to keep a plain, non-graphical version that contains any boilerplate/policy language required in your syllabus which you would want to omit from an infographic and also for accessibility purposes. If you are required to use a standardized syllabus consider using a graphical version as a "course overview" document instead of an actual syllabus. If you are considering using additional graphics in formatting to gain attention and promote motivation you'll also want to make sure that your syllabus is accessible.

Writing an approachable syllabus

Layout

The syllabus often sets the tone for the course. Making sure the syllabus is readable, uncluttered, and accessible is a good place to start. If you are providing the syllabus in a PDF or Word document there are some easy things you can do to improve readability and encourage students to actually read the entire document. Participants in Motameni, Rice, and LaRosa’s (2015) study indicated that “the more visually separated and accentuated a syllabus is the more students see it as most usable. They want a syllabus that is more visual than textual and more structured with separations than with block text: (p. 83). Since you are not printing and stapling these syllabi or working with a limited printing allotment there is no longer a reason to use a small font, reduced line spacing, small margins, and no white space. For example, the following image shows the difference in readability between single-spaced 10 point Calibri and 1.15 spaced 11 point Calibri.

Tone

Whether your syllabus is in a Word or PDF document or directly in the Blackboard Syllabus tool, writing in second person form rather than third person, academic-style form will make it more approachable. This is true not just in the syllabus but also when describing your activities, assignments, concepts, and evaluation criteria. Using “you” and “your,” “me,” “we,” and “us” helps students to think about the course as an active connection between people and not as a separate, inanimate object. When in doubt, run your text through a Readability Checker. You may also find the section on Writing for the Ear in the Multimedia Module helpful. (Scroll down toward the bottom of the page.)

Teaching Approach

In addition to a personal introduction and a course introduction, many faculty like to provide a brief teaching philosophy or teaching style statement in their syllabus or introductory materials. If you have one or are working on one for promotion and tenure you already have a starting point. Student-facing teaching philosophy statements should be written in the first person to feel friendly and welcoming. Following is an example from IUB School of Education faculty member Jessica Nina-Lester for her graduate-level qualitative research methods course.

My Approach/Commitment:

In this course, my primary goal is to establish a safe and inclusive environment that will support your learning. Throughout the semester, I invite your questions and critiques, desiring thoughtful dialogue to be central to our learning experience. In this course, we will work to understand a variety of positions and practices associated with the qualitative inquiry process, pushing one another to question taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions. Throughout the course, we will remind each other that there is not "one right" way to carry out a qualitative research study. Rather, there are many theoretical and methodological positions from which to work when considering qualitative research. As such, we will work to understand a variety of positions. This does not mean that you may not disagree with one another or with me about these varied perspectives and approaches. Yet, in order to facilitate our learning environment, we will each work to cultivate a classroom space that generates respectful, thoughtful, and empathetic understanding. What we come to learn is a shared experience; thus, we will all work to cultivate a community of learners.
In our learning community, I will position myself as a co-learner, as well as a teacher. Hence, if I am teaching and you are not learning, then I am not teaching. Please let me know! Throughout the semester, I welcome your feedback and will encourage your participation in an informal mid semester evaluation. In addition, throughout the semester, you can expect feedback from me, with this feedback designed to support your growth as a qualitative researcher.

**Structuring the Course: Resources for Building the Course**

**Additional Information**

- [Syllabus Basics](#) (Links to an external site.) from the IUB Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning
- Palmer, Bach, and Streifer's Rubric for Syllabus Review

**References**


(Go back to top)
Usability and Findability

It's About the Experience

Usability, findability, and visual design are critical aspects of the way your students experience your course. Just as you try to set a certain tone in your classroom to support student learning, your online class also has a tone and a feel to it. A good student experience requires a functional and usable course. A great student experience also needs thoughtfulness. Think about how your students may feel when beginning a task or trying to navigate the course. Imagine someone close to you doing these things. Would they find it interesting and enjoyable, or would they be frustrated and lose motivation?

Usability refers to the ease with which an individual can navigate, understand, learn, and use something. In this case, the something is your course, and the individuals are your students. Usability is not something commonly considered in face-to-face courses, but it is a critical component of online course success. It is defined as the ability of the user to "do what he or she wants to do, the way he or she expects to be able to do it, without hindrance, hesitation, or questions" (Rubin, Chisnell & Spool, 2008). It also tends to be an umbrella term that includes other components such as findability, accessibility, readability, etc. - all important aspects in supporting a positive student experience.

There are several versions of usability principles for online learning - most stemming from the work of Jakob Nielsen. Some of the major principles that faculty have control over include:

Accessibility

Discussed in detail in the accessibility section of this module.

Consistency

Includes consistency of layout, navigation, images, and terminology used.

You’ll notice throughout these pages, the content is displayed consistently from page to page, and the images and graphics are similar in appearance, size, and shape. The intent is to make these pages approachable and easy to navigate. Contrast these pages to many commercial news websites like Yahoo or MSN where the pages are cluttered with a mix of story links, pictures, video, notices, and advertisements which makes it more difficult to navigate. The less time your students are hunting for information or spending energy trying to distinguish the important information from the decoration or side notes, the more time and energy they have to learn what you want them to learn.

(See Findability below)

Visual Clarity

Includes using legible fonts, color contrast, white space, headings, and indents to visually organize text as well as eliminating distracting animations and most purely decorative graphics

Readability
Findability: A key component of usability

If your students can't find what they are looking for, don't understand the instructions to an assignment, or aren't able to download an article or worksheet, they can't do what you are asking them to do or learn what you are asking them to learn. Lack of findability impacts student self-efficacy, motivation, and learning. Robins, Simunich, and Kelly (2013) found that students experienced frustration and reduced motivation when findability was reduced due to:

- Lack of use of logical categories for organizing content and activities
- Poor labeling, including use of file names as labels
- Deeply buried content such as placing a syllabus in a folder in instead of using the syllabus tool
- Lack of visual contrast among page elements

The Modules tool in Blackboard can make organization and navigation easier for yourself and your students. Modules allows you to aggregate your content, activities, and assignments for the module in one easy-to-find place and put things in the order that you want your students to work through them.

Course Organizational Map Outline (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

By placing all your content, assignments, quizzes/tests, discussions, etc. in folders/modules, you can hide the Assignments, Quizzes, Discussions, and Files from student view. This provides students with one place to look for everything. That means fewer "where is ____?” questions for you and less frustration for your students. Starting each module with an overview including what the students are to read, watch, and explore as well as a brief description of the assignment(s) for that module also improves usability. Think about it as if you are providing an outline of the concepts in the folder/module.

When moving a course online or revising from a previous online course, organizing with Modules also allows you to see where there may be too much material for the students to work through in the time provided as well as where there may be gaps in content that need to be filled in order for students to complete required assignments.

Visual Design for Usability

Using images and visual organizers supports learning and can improve recall. Because the brain codes visual and verbal information separately, associating facts and concepts with clear graphics provides two channels to memory.

Visual Design and Attention

As you have likely experienced, students don't always pay attention to everything you give them. That's not unexpected since people in general do not pay attention to everything they do and read. For example, check out Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons (1999) "The Invisible Gorilla" test (Links to an external site.). Viewers are asked to watch and count how many times a group of individuals pass the ball around. The study found that 50% of the participants completely missed the gorilla who walked in the middle of the ball-passing group.

Peters (2014) points out that there are certain visual features humans recognize unconsciously that we can use to orient students and draw attention to different parts of a graphic or page.

- **Shape** - closed shapes and boundaries connect their contents
- **Size** - the larger, the more important.
- **Grouping** - by proximity, similarity, or connectedness
- **Position** - certain things always go in a specific part of the page such as navigation buttons
- **Contrast** - putting elements together with differing color, direction, size, or shape

Higgenbotham (2011) notes that

> You convey information by the way you arrange a design’s elements in relation to each other. This information is understood immediately, if not consciously, by the people viewing your designs. This is great if the visual relationships are obvious and accurate, but if they're not, your audience is going to get confused. They’ll have to examine your work carefully, going back and forth between the different parts to make sure they understand.

For example, mixing photographs with clip art with line drawings (image) (Links to an external site.), can confuse your students and distract from your content (Tom Kuhlman, 2009) (Links to an external site.). A single large illustrative image is more likely to grab the viewer's attention and be memorable that a collection of smaller, mismatched images.
A Note on Color

Using color to organize and call attention to things is a common strategy in textbooks and online learning materials. However, there are challenges to working with color due to differences in how different brands and types of monitors, tablets, and phones display colors and how different people perceive colors as they are displayed. While individuals with varying levels of color-blindness may have trouble telling colors apart, the general public also has troubles identifying colors at times. For example, can you tell the color of the dress? (Links to an external site.)

Visual Design and Comprehension

When you are presenting and explaining content to your students, the goal is comprehension and learning. Writing for readability is a good way to start but it is important to not overlook the way in which your text is presented.

Which block of text is easier to read?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left aligned</th>
<th>Center aligned</th>
<th>Right aligned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lady Macbeth, Act I, sc. 7 (line 35)</td>
<td>Lady Macbeth, Act I, sc. 7 (line 35)</td>
<td>Lady Macbeth, Act I, sc. 7 (line 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the hope drunk</td>
<td>Was the hope drunk</td>
<td>Was the hope drunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wherein you dressed yourself?</td>
<td>Wherein you dressed yourself?</td>
<td>Wherein you dressed yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hath it slept since?</td>
<td>Hath it slept since?</td>
<td>Hath it slept since?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And wakes it now to look so green and pale</td>
<td>And wakes it now to look so green and pale</td>
<td>And wakes it now to look so green and pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At what it did so freely?</td>
<td>At what it did so freely?</td>
<td>At what it did so freely?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Native speakers of languages written left to right have difficulty reading centered or right-aligned text because people look for a consistent starting point for each line of text. When our eyes and brain have to search for the beginning of each line, it takes us longer to read, increases effort, and reduces efficiency.

What About Fonts?

Words hold power. But the aesthetic manner in which those words are presented can affect the way we read, and the way we think about the information presented. (Chris Gayomali, The Week) (Links to an external site.)

There is NO option to change the font in the Blackboard Rich Content Editor so the section below is primarily for materials you are providing students through PDFs, PowerPoint files, or other downloadable documents types. This is design decision on the part of Blackboard both for usability reasons as well as the philosophy that the individual user should have control of the font they see through setting preferences in their browser of choice (Links to an external site.).

High definition displays mean the old rule of thumb of serif fonts for paper and san-serif fonts for screen, no longer holds true. Current display technology can render serifs as cleanly as a printer so there is no need to restrict your font choice based on the delivery method. However, there are still a few things to consider before choosing a font (or fonts) for your materials.

While readability generally refers to the content of the text via a Readability Checker, font also plays a role. If students can't decipher the words easily you can lose them whether or not the text is written at an appropriate reading level. Letters have to be quickly and clearly distinguishable from one another without having to stop to think about them.

Research has shown that occasionally using slightly less readable fonts, causes readers to slow down and read more carefully. This also holds true for text written in italics. The letters are not shaped the same way as the majority of text we read, so we have to make a greater effort to read that style of text. The point is to use this strategy sparingly. Results from French, et al. (2013) appear to support that it is useful up to 56 words at a time. Longer passages in slightly less readable fonts may lead to cognitive fatigue.

However, fonts that are very hard to read can lead to both lack of comprehension and lack of motivation. For example, Song and Schwartz (2008) showed that students given either exercise instructions or recipes in an easy-to-read font believed that they would be able to complete the actions required and were more willing to try. Alternatively, participants who were given the same instructions in a hard-to-read font comprehended less of the text and, as a result, thought the instructions were more complex, doubted their ability to do what was asked of them, and were less willing to even try.

While font choice clearly affects readability, the research on font and typeface shows that your choice of font also affects the emotional reaction to the content. Fonts set the tone of the writing. Modern fonts are designed with a purpose and a persona; some are friendly while others are more direct, and others quite elegant (Brumberger, 2003). Chris Gayomali's article How typeface influences the way we read and think (Links to an external site.) provides a nice overview.

Visual Design and Trust

Research shows that people make decisions about the credibility of a source based in large part on how the content looks. Whenever you take in information from any source, your brain evaluates that information based on the combination of a cognitive component (to assign meaning) and an affective component (to assign value). Research consistently shown that human beings value things they perceive to be attractive and tend to evaluate them as more trustworthy, professional, and credible (Fogg, et al, 2003; Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010).

In one example, a psychology professor at Cornell analyzed data from a large study (n=45,524) of New York Times readers (Links to an external site.) presented with the same article in different fonts. Each person reaching the page was presented with the article in a random font from their list of Baskerville, Georgia, Computer Modern, Helvetica, Trebuchet, and Comic Sans. The results showed statistically significant differences in assessment of the truth and reliability of the article based on the font in which it was read. Baskerville was far and away the winner with the highest rate of
agreement and the lowest rate of disagreement at a p-value of .0068. Fonts are something to pay attention to when evaluating web resources for your students.

Take a look at the two screenshots below from the perspective of a student judging whether the information on the site is credible enough to cite in a paper. Which content do you think looks more trustworthy?

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**Photosynthesis (the big picture)**

Like it or not, chemistry continues to sneak itself into our beloved biology course. This is because what distinguishes living things from nonliving things is the presence of cells, and cells are nothing but bags of chemicals with a multitude of chemical reactions occurring inside them. And furthermore, all the metabolic activities in cells are being directed by a famous bunch of chemicals we refer to as DNA. Compounds, chemicals, chemical reactions ... these are what produce the structures & functions within the basic units of structure & function for living things (cells).

Anyhow ... our topic right now, namely photosynthesis, is arguably one of the most important chemical reactions occurring on the planet. Let’s see why.

Let's begin with some basic questions & answers about photosynthesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>ANSWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is photosynthesis?</td>
<td>Photosynthesis is a chemical reaction in which light energy is converted to chemical energy in glucose. It is the means by which the energy in sunlight becomes usable to living things. Living things can eat glucose, we can’t eat sunlight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exactly why is photosynthesis so important?</td>
<td>Two big reasons. One product of photosynthesis is glucose (sugar), which provides the basic for most food chains. The second product of photosynthesis is oxygen which comes in handy if your happen to be an aerobic organism that requires oxygen for survival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where does photosynthesis occur?</td>
<td>This question can be answered on various levels. On the planetary level, most photosynthesis occurs in the ocean, because the ocean occupies the vast majority (70%) of the earth’s surface. In terms of organisms, photosynthesis occurs in autotrophs that contain the green pigment chlorophyll. This would include the entire plant kingdom, “half” of the Protista (the algae), &amp; “half” the Monera kingdom (the blue-green algae). On the multicellular level, photosynthesis occurs in the leaves of plants. We will take an up-close &amp; personal look at these in a bit ... On the cellular level, the reactions for photosynthesis occur in organelles called chloroplasts (in eukaryotic cells). Blue-green algae (which are prokaryotic) carry out the photosynthesis reactions in the cytoplasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What raw materials are needed for the process of photosynthesis?</td>
<td>As mentioned in the above box, chlorophyll must be present. (Chlorophyll absorbs solar energy). Sunlight is necessary. That’s why we call it PHOTOSynthesis. And from the environment, photosynthetic organisms must get water &amp; carbon dioxide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the most part, when thinking of organisms that carry-out photosynthesis, it is safe to picture plants. It’s not that we have any right to ignore the photosynthetic Protista & Monera, but, well, it sure is easier to picture a tree than a Euglena. Don’t you agree?

Remember, it turns out that most photosynthesis on Earth is occurring in the ocean, & the organisms in the ocean doing the job happen to be classified into the Protist Kingdom — algae (seaweeds), diatoms, etc. So let’s not forget them completely.

Having said that, let’s take a look at plants & how they are adapted for photosynthesis. The leaves of plants are the photosynthesis factories. The structure of a “typical” leaf is illustrated in the following table.

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**Leaf Layers**

This pic shows a leaf cross section with only the layers labelled. Please note that each roundish shape is a single plant cell. So each layer is a plant tissue (a group of cells). The top & bottom layers are both referred to as an epidermis (outer layer). The upper epidermis (stomata present) & the lower epidermis (stomata not) basically are protective layers. They are coated with a waxy surface, the cuticle, which further protects the leaf & prevents excess water loss. The area sandwiched in the middle of the leaf is referred to as “mesophyll”. There are two layers in the mesophyll:

1) The palisade layer - packed tight w/ oval cells
2) The spongy layer - this area contains circular cells that are spread out — allowing gaseous to circulate within the leaf.
Fogg et al. (2003) found that the most common feature participants cited for regarding a web site as credible was visual design, comprising over 46% of the credibility decision. This included logical layout, readable fonts and appropriate font size, use of white space, professional-looking images, and muted color schemes. These findings were confirmed by Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders (2010) where an “especially prevalent form” of heuristic evaluation of credibility centered on visual design, readability, navigation, and writing mechanics such as grammar and spelling. They found that their participants frequently noted “that visually unpleasant font type and size, poor layout, and bad use of graphics all indicated “amateurish” sites, signaling low credibility” (p. 431).

Improving Usability and Visual Design

How can I improve usability in my course?

Seeing your course and materials from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with your content and organizational structure can help you to clarify important instructions and emphasize important concepts. Having someone else review your course for usability provides a useful second set of eyes to help you see things you hadn’t noticed before. Here are some usability questions that you can use to review the usability in your course. You can download these questions to refer to each semester: Usability and Visual Design Questions for Online Courses (pdf, 65K) (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

General Course Questions

- Are your learning outcomes easy to find and clearly tied to modules and assessments?
- Does your beginning-of-the-semester course home page include or link to a brief introduction to the course and explicit instructions on what
to do first?
- Do students have a single main path to follow to move through the course?
- Are there clear, easy-to-find instructions for contacting both you and Tech Support?

Text Content and Instructions Questions
- Do your page titles accurately describe page content?
- Are your content areas, assignment instructions, etc. written in an active, 2nd-person voice?
- Have your page content areas, assignment instructions, etc. been proofread?
- Do your content areas, syllabus, assignments, etc. use headings and indenting to help readers follow your organizational structure?
- Are your instructions clear to people with a student-level understanding of the concepts?
- Are there rubrics, models, or examples to help students understand what they are supposed to do?
- Are all links in your content and instructions working and have some description of what the link is to and what the student is to do once they follow the link?

Visuals and Multimedia Usability Questions
- Are your images crisp and clear (not skewed or blurry)?
- If you use color, is the color contrast strong enough for everyone to see?
- If you have images with text in them, is the text clear and large enough to read (and does it have alt text for assistive technology)?
- Do longer videos (>15 minutes) have a table of contents with time marks for each section above or below the video?
- Is the audio on videos clear and understandable?

How can I improve visual design in my course?
There are several easy updates you can make to your course to help student visually navigate more easily.

Visual Design Questions
- Do you have relevant images (charts, graphs, diagrams, pictures) to break up longer sections of text?
- Do your images have a similar look and feel to them (photos with photos, line drawings with line drawings, etc.)?
- Are your images illustrating concepts or providing examples (not only decorative)?
- Do different sections of your page have enough white space around them to be clear what belongs with each one?
- Is your text almost all left aligned (unless you're teaching a language that reads right to left)?
- Is your text almost all in the default font size?

* To find images, try the resources listed in the Content module.
** Readers can adjust font size in their browsers to meet their individual needs.

For a good tutorial on visual design basics see Clean Up Your Mess - A guide to visual design for everyone.

What if I'm teaching a course I didn't design and can't change?
That's a really good question. While no one wants to teach a course with usability or accessibility problems, sometimes these things happen. While the best case scenario is to work with the faculty member or committee that designed the course to improve usability there are times that isn't possible due to time constraints or other complications. In terms of usability, while you may not be able to change the original course, you can still help your students to have a better experience. If you can add an ungraded discussion forum, students can ask questions there and you can respond and clarify for the entire class. If not, regular use of Announcements is an easy way to share updates and clarifications.

Preemptively review the course for usability issues and document them so you know where the stumbling blocks are. If there are issues with clarity of instructions, rubrics, models, or examples, you can clarify or provide additional examples, diagrams, or charts. If you have broken links or links without descriptions of what they are to do once there, you can preemptively provide the correct link and/or explanation. If the course is not using the Modules tool and there is no single place where students can go to find their path through the course, you can provide a course map or a video walkthrough to help students understand where everything is and how to get there. You can create a video walkthrough and embed it into either an announcement or a discussion forum. Be sure to include full transcripts for students with hearing or visual issues.

The key is to figure out where students will have problems and questions as early in the semester as possible and provide clarifying material at the time they are beginning to work on each section. If students receive all the clarifications at the beginning of the semester they will forget that they have them when the section begins. By providing just-in-time support, students are better able to take advantage of the additional resources you are providing.

Finally, keeping notes on the issues and the strategies you used to help students past them can be a valuable resource when it is possible to update or revise the course.

Usability and Visual Design: Practicing with Visual Design
Aesthetically pleasing interfaces are more usable (Norman, 2003). Working with well-designed tools and content supports positive emotions which are important to learning, creative thinking, curiosity, motivation, and the ability to cope with minor problems.

How can you improve usability and aesthetics in your course?
As you become more comfortable in working with images and alignment, the better-trained your eye will be in noticing things like not enough white space, skewed images, and test issues. To practice, download the Practice with Visuals PowerPoint file.

Usability and Visual Design: Resources

Additional Information

Clean Up Your Mess - A guide to visual design for everyone

Usability Guidelines:

- Principles for Usable Design (Links to an external site.)
- Principles of Accessible and Universal Design (Links to an external site.)

More than Just Eye Candy (Links to an external site.) by Clark & Lyons. This article is good for learning about the types of visuals used in instruction; however, the example graphics they use are dated as the article was written in 2003.

Typography and readability by Itkonen (Links to an external site.) (Translated from Itkonen, M. 2007. Typografian käsikirja. 3. edition. Helsinki: RPS-yhtiöt.)

Color Theory for the Color Bind (Links to an external site.) is a nice walk-through of things to consider and strategies to use to make your visuals and text color-blind friendly.
References

- Haugen, J. L. (2015) Becoming a more thoughtful user experience designer (Links to an external site.). UX Magazine
Module 7: Accessibility - How can I help my students who use assistive technology?

Accessibility: How can I help my students who use assistive technology?

You can significantly improve accessibility in your course by following three relatively simple practices as you design course materials and by keeping accessibility in mind as you think about activities and assessments. After completing this module, if you have any questions regarding accessibility please contact accessibility@easternct.edu.

Learning Objectives

Designing for accessibility from the beginning will save you time and stress when a disability accommodation is necessary. In this module, we discuss the whys and hows of making your materials and your course more accessible. By the end of this module we hope you will be able to:

- recognize why it is important to make a course accessible, and
- start working on strategies to enhance accessibility in your course.

Table of Contents

- Accessibility for Online Courses
- Improving Accessibility in Your Course
- Thinking about Accessibility Options
- Accessibility: Resources

Accessibility for Online Courses

Why is accessibility so important?

In the context of online courses, accessibility means making it possible for all students, regardless of physical or developmental impairment, to use all course materials and tools. A course is accessible to the degree that every student can get to, perceive, and navigate course content and assignments; submit assignments; and successfully use all course tools. Accessible design is often included under the larger umbrella of "universal design for learning (Links to an external site.)" because it considers all possible users.

Accessibility of online courses is important because:

- A significant number of people have disabilities that can make it difficult for them to take an online course. According to 2010 U.S. Census estimates, almost one in five people have some kind of disability. Over half of these have a severe disability. According to 2010 U.S. Census estimates, almost one in five people have some kind of disability. Over half of these have a severe disability.
  - Table with 2010 census disabilities numbers (pdf, 556k) (Links to an external site.)
  - Press release about disabilities numbers in 2010 census (Links to an external site.)
  - Many students with disabilities prefer online courses to face-to-face courses. An accessible online course enables students with disabilities to participate on more equal footing with other students, without drawing attention to their disabilities, or being held back by them.
  - Accessibility is required by law. Federal law requires universities to make courses accessible.
    - Article discussing legal issues related to online course accessibility (Links to an external site.)
  - Accessibility features benefit many students, not just those with documented disabilities. Just as physical accessibility measures have made life easier for many people not categorized as disabled (e.g., ramps assist people with carts, strollers, knee injuries, etc.), many of the accessibility features in online courses help a wide range of students.

What challenges do people with disabilities face working online?

There are four major categories of disability, and each type has different types of problems accessing online courses. These disabilities can be permanent or temporary, and may result from genetics, disease, injury, or age-related changes.

Visual

Visual disabilities include blindness, low vision, and color blindness (White, Goette, & Young, 2005, p.5 (Links to an external site.)). Individuals with visual disabilities may:

- need to use a screen reader and the keyboard to access what's on a computer.
- not be able to use a mouse.
- not be able to tell one color from another.
- need to enlarge text and illustrations in order to see them.

The following video (Smith, 2012) demonstrates how people with disabilities access online courses. (Watch from the 2-minute mark until the 8:28 mark.)
Hearing

Hearing disabilities include partial and complete deafness. Individuals with hearing loss may not be able to hear the audio in podcasts, voice-over PowerPoints, videos, and other online media.

Cognitive

Cognitive disabilities (White, Goette, & Young, 2005, p.32) include learning disabilities and other disorders that make individuals especially distractible or unable to focus on, process, or remember information. Individuals with cognitive disabilities may:

- have trouble reading text or interpreting illustrations.
- need to use a screen reader to help them understand text.
- be confused by complex layouts or navigation schemes.
- have trouble focusing on or comprehending lengthy sections of text, audio, or video.

Motor

Motor disabilities include paralysis and limited fine or gross motor control. Individuals with motor disabilities may:

- not be able to access content that requires a mouse.
- need to use assistive technologies like head wands and voice-recognition software to access a course.
- have slow response time.
- become easily fatigued by movements that wouldn't be tiring for most people.

What do I need to put in my syllabus?

Here is an example statement regarding accessibility that you could include in your syllabus:

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities (e.g. mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision, neurological, etc.) You must have established your eligibility for support services through the appropriate office that services students with disabilities. Note that services are confidential, may take time to put into place and are not retroactive. Captions and alternate media for print materials may take three or more weeks to get produced. Please contact your campus adaptive educational services office as soon as possible if accommodations are needed.

Improving Accessibility in Your Course

What can I do to improve accessibility?

By employing a few simple techniques when creating your courses and materials that maximize accessibility, you won't be scrambling when a student needs accommodation, because you will have done most of the work already. Many accessibility problems in instructor-created course content
can be prevented by three relatively simple practices that will significantly improve accessibility for your course.

Use headings and other built-in style features

Using built-in styles and layouts improves both the usability and accessibility of Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, Blackboard content areas, and other files. As you create these files:

- Use headings (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3) to format and mark headings and indicate the organization of the content. Headings help everyone recognize ordinal and co-ordinal relationships between topics and enable those using screen readers to skim the page and find what they need.
- Use built-in bullet lists and numbered lists instead of trying to create them using tabs and spaces. The built-in lists provide a navigational structure for those using screen readers.
- Use built-in layouts in PowerPoint rather than building your own with text boxes. The built-in layouts include mark-ups, similar to the headings described above, which ensures that information is presented in the correct order for those using screen readers.

Write concise and meaningful link text

If link text is meaningless or too long, students using screen readers have trouble figuring out where the link will take them. Keep link text concise and make sure that it makes sense out of context.

- "Click here" is problematic.
- "Contact your advisor" is better than "Click here to contact your advisor" or "Link to academic advisors."
- Use URLs as link text only if the URL is very short and meaningful.
- If an image serves as a link, the alternative text of the image serves as the link text, so make sure that it follows the guidelines for links.

See WebAIM's page on links and hypertext (Links to an external site.) for more information.

Provide a text alternative for images where appropriate

Alternative text (also called "alt text") is invisible text attached to images. It is read aloud by a screen reader, enabling someone who can't see the image to access the meaning of the image. Programs such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint enable you to add alternative text to images. In Blackboard, you add alternative text to the Image Attributes when you add an image.

Alternative text is required for all images, and writing it can be tricky, so the WebAIM "How to Write Appropriate alt Text" (Links to an external site.) tutorial is highly recommended. (You can skip the parts about HTML.) To get you started, here are some basic guidelines for writing it, depending on whether the image is active, informational, redundant, or textual.

**Active Images**
- The image serves as a link or button. Clicking it or hovering over it causes something to happen.
- Use alt text that conveys the function of the image (for example, "View map of Antarctica").

**Informational Images**
- The image is not active but conveys information that is not given in a caption or the body of the content.
- Use alternative text that conveys the same information as the image.

**Decorative/Redundant Images**
- The image is redundant to the text or conveys no information.
- Use alt="" for the alternative text.

**Textual Images**
- The image is of text.
- Use alternative text that is the same as the text in the image.

How well do you understand alternate text? Try this Self-Check: Alternate Text to put your knowledge to the test!

What about video captioning?

Even if you don't have a student with hearing difficulties in your class, captions can be quite helpful to other students. Students for whom English is not their primary language, students with certain cognitive challenges, and students watching your videos in noisy environments can all benefit by the addition of captioning. Some video services such as YouTube offer mechanical captioning using speech to text technology. If you have a strong accent, if there are multiple people in the video, or if you are in a field where use of terms not commonly found in everyday conversation is common you will need to review the captions and make corrections.

Improving accessibility and usability at the same time

In addition to the items listed above, both usability and accessibility can also be improved by:

- using easy to read fonts (see discussion of fonts in the Usability Module). Using san-serif, non-italicized, monospaced (fixed-width) fonts especially improve readability for students with dyslexia (Links to an external site.).
• making sure any pdfs of articles or other documents not created by you are actual documents and not just images of journal pages. This assists both students using screen readers and students who like to be able to search the content of an article or document to find and review information. Using Adobe Acrobat Pro, you can [run optical character recognition on any pdfs](https://adobe.com/). Using scripts when recording presentations. Scripts can then be provided as transcripts to students with hearing difficulties or for whom English may not be their primary language.

**Accessibility in a course you didn't design and can't change**

The best case scenario is to work with the faculty member or committee that designed the course to improve accessibility. When you review the course for usability, it is a good idea to document potential accessibility concerns such as document and page formatting, textual images, non-captioned video, and links without meaningful text, as well as use of additional tools that may not be accessible for students with visual, hearing, or motor disabilities. Bringing accessibility concerns to their attention is the first step toward getting them addressed. If you have a student who has requested accommodation in your class your campus accessibility center will contact you and may connect you with the appropriate individual to provide materials, assignments, and assessments in a way that is accessible to that particular student.

**When should I ask for help to ensure my course is accessible?**

Although the three simple practices described above are rather easy for anyone to do, some practices that improve accessibility are more difficult or time-consuming and will likely need professionals trained in accessibility accommodation to implement. The following are a list of "triggers" for you to contact your campus accessibility center:

- You are using non-Blackboard integrated, third-party tools - especially those with known issues like Adobe Captivate, Adobe Presenter, Articulate Storyline, and Quizlet
- You are using third-party tools offered by your text-book publisher - especially those with known issues like Pearson Mathlab or ALEKS from McGraw Hill
- You are linking to many different websites which you want students to read/watch/listen to the material.
- You are presenting a large amount of material that is highly dependent on a single sense (e.g., multiple images; a lot of music; data visualizations that are highly dependent on color)
- You are requiring students to use a specific software tool or package (e.g., SPSS, ArcGIS, etc.)

**Thinking About Accessibility Options**

Planning for accessibility doesn't automatically mean creating multiple versions or discarding activities, assignments, or content up-front because it could be inaccessible for certain students. It means having thought through what you would do if a student for whom that activity was inaccessible registered for your class.

**Are you ready to support students needing accommodation for disabilities?**

Review the activities and assignments in your online (or to-be-online) course and pick one that may provide challenges to students with visual, hearing, or motor disabilities.

1. What specific parts of the activity/assignment may be problematic?
2. How could you potentially revise the activity/assignment to improve accessibility?
3. What might an alternate version of the activity/assignment look like that would still meet the learning outcomes but eliminate the accessibility issues.

**Accessibility: Resources**

**Additional Information**

**Universal Design for Learning Resources**

- [National Center on Universal Design for Learning Website](https://www.universaldesign.org/)
  : Provides universal Design Guidelines

**Creating Accessible Word Documents**

- [IU Accessibility Tutorial](https://accessibility.iu.edu/)
  : IU provides some general guidelines and tips for creating accessible Word documents.
- [WebAim Tutorial](https://webaim.org/tutorials/
  ): This tutorial describes how to use headings, add alt text, create links, and use Word's Accessibility Checker to identify accessibility problems. It also explains how to convert Word to HTML.
- [Microsoft Tutorial Videos](https://support.office.com/en-us/videos/)
  : A series of short videos from Microsoft
- [Accessible Digital Office Document Project Tutorial](https://accessibility.iu.edu/projects/office/
  ), (Mac): This webpage provides instructions for creating accessibility Mac Microsoft Word documents.

**Creating Accessible PowerPoint Presentations**

- [IU Accessibility Tutorial](https://accessibility.iu.edu/)
  : IU provides some general guidelines and tips for creating accessible PowerPoint presentations.
• Microsoft PowerPoint Accessibility Information (Links to an external site.): This tutorial provides best practices for creating accessible PowerPoints (Windows, Mac, iOS, Android, and online). It also provides instruction on how to alt text for graphic, hyperlinks, and accessible design tips.

Creating Accessible Excel Documents

• IU Accessibility Tutorial (Links to an external site.): IU provides some general guidelines and tips for creating accessible Excel documents.

Creating Accessible PDF Documents

• IU Accessibility Tutorial (Links to an external site.): IU provides some general guidelines and tips for creating accessible PDF documents.
• WebAim Tutorial (Links to an external site.): This tutorial describes how to convert documents to PDF, to evaluate, repair, and enhance accessibility of PDFs, and to create accessible PDF form.

Creating Accessible Multimedia

• IU Accessibility Tutorial (Links to an external site.): IU provides general guidelines and tips for creating accessible multimedia.
• WebAim Accessible Multimedia Tutorial (Links to an external site.): This tutorial provides information on how to create captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions.
• WebAim Flash Accessibility Tutorial (Links to an external site.): This module provides an overview of flash accessibility, its issues, assistive technology support, and screen reader accessibility.
Module 8: Multimedia - How can I make it, find it, and use it in my online class?

Multimedia: How can I make it, find it, and use it in my online course?

**Learning Objectives**

Video, audio, and images are important to include in an online course to provide alternative means of communication for students who may have reading difficulties or simply learn easier through visual and auditory channels. Media you create also provides an additional channel for teaching presence and reinforces that you are a human being and not just a name on a screen. By the end of this module, we hope that you will be able to:

- evaluate third-party video for engagement and applicability
- weigh the pros and cons of creating your own videos and if you choose, make an engaging, reusable video
- create presentations that are engaging and use tools in addition to or instead of PowerPoint

**Table of Contents**

- Multimedia: Using Video in Online Classes
- Multimedia: Making Your Own Videos
- Multimedia: Presentations and Interactive Media
- Multimedia: Video and Presentation Planning Checklist
- Multimedia: Resources

**Multimedia: Using Video in Online Classes**

**How should I use videos?**

It depends. It depends on your learning objectives, your content, your activities, and your students. If you want your students to be able to do something that someone can demonstrate, then video would be the best option. If your content involves specific places or cultures, video can help to make them real to your students in ways that pictures and words on a page cannot. If parts of your content are especially challenging to your students, walking through these rough points with diagrams or a virtual whiteboard can provide clarification. If your students have difficulty engaging with the content, videos can offer a more approachable way in.

The following is an example of an engaging video to begin a section. IU Media Arts and Sciences lecturer Mathew A. Powers (Links to an external site.) collaborated with author John Green and his production company and School of Informatics alumni to develop this video on the history of games. The video is part of a larger series stemming from his class History of Video Games course (Inside IU article). (Links to an external site.)

Transcript - Ancient Games Video. (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

**Considerations for video**

You have options to use video like the one above, developed by others and repurposed in your course, or to make your own videos. The following are considerations for using "found" video and the following page discusses considerations for making your own videos.

**How well does the video align with your class?** Is it something that will directly help students reach a learning outcome or is interesting but not directly applicable. If it's not supporting a learning outcome but you still want to include it, placing it in an "Additional Resources" or "If You'd Like to Know More" section. Traditional-aged students are more likely to explore additional video resources than additional readings. If only part of the video is
Just like any other content, you need to consider if an external video is at the right level for your students, e.g., YouTube. Do they have the prerequisite background knowledge to get out what you want them to get out of it? Students will tune out if they don't understand what the speaker is talking about - especially if they use jargon, acronyms, and other technical terms the student doesn't know. If you still want to use it, consider annotating the video in VoiceThread or VideoAnt (Links to an external site.) (if it's on YouTube). You can also explain unfamiliar terms using comments on the media page or prefacing the video with an explanation if you're embedding the video in a Blackboard content area. If you have a student who needs accommodation they will work with your campus's disability services office for captioning and/or audio description of third party video.

If you want to use video from a DVD or tape or from a non-public source, make sure to contact the J. Eugene Smith Library reference desk at (860) 465-4699. If the video you would like to use is from your textbook publisher (for example, from an instructor's resource DVD that one might show in class), ask your publisher representative for permission to put sections of the video online. Normally publishers do not have an issue since it will be behind the walls of Blackboard and your students are purchasing their book. However, if you change textbooks, don't presume that you still have permission to continue to use the video.

What makes videos engaging?

Once you've found videos that could be useful for your class, how do you evaluate which ones are good and which ones are less so? They don't need to be TED Talks or Kahn Academy videos to be effective and engaging but if your students can't understand the speakers, see what's going on clearly, or are constantly distracted by poor production quality they may not get the information they need.

Reviewing Videos: Release your inner movie critic

Go to YouTube and find a mix of videos on your course topic. Searching for channels that aggregate videos from multiple sources like this one on Developmental Psychology (Links to an external site.) or this one on Inorganic Chemistry (Links to an external site.), is an easy way to find a variety.

Watch several videos taking the perspective of a student and think about the following questions.

- What elements of the video engaged you with the video content?
  - Audio elements
  - Visual elements
  - Speaker presentation elements
  - Video production elements
- What elements of the video distracted you from the video content?
  - Audio elements
  - Visual elements
  - Speaker presentation elements
  - Video production elements

Reviewing other's videos is a good way to understand what works and doesn't work to keep a viewer's attention and aid in understanding in ways a textbook cannot.

A group of IU Southeast faculty reviewed several videos from other faculty on YouTube as part of an orientation to online teaching class offered by the Institute for Learning and Teaching Excellence and they came up with the following themes. (And, remember, these recommendations apply to videos you make as much as they do to videos you find.)

- **Speaker enthusiasm** helps maintain interest. Vary voice volume so it's not monotone. Be confident!
- A quick **pace** is good but not so quick that the student can't follow (especially important when the presenter has a strong accent).
- **Showing is better than telling when possible**, use visual aids and make sure your lighting is good so they can be clearly seen.
- **Minimize distractions** such as other people, unrelated or confusing visuals, and noises such as mouse clicks, fans, etc.
- **Avoid zooming**, switching between cameras, and other camera movements as they can make some people "seasick."
- **Talk to the camera**, not the lectern or the computer.
- **Avoid video that doesn't go beyond the textbook.** Reading slides (especially with lists of bullet points) is not helpful or engaging.

The bottom line is, **does the video keep your attention?** If you were dozing or multitasking while the video was playing the odds are good your students will be also.

Multimedia: Making Your Own Videos

While making even basic webcam video can be a scary process for some, personal video shows students that their instructor is an "active participant in the presentation of new material rather than just selecting appropriate readings or videos for students to passively absorb" (Bronsky, 2015). If you've never done video before, it's okay to start small. A personal introduction, a course introduction, or short, weekly or bi-weekly summaries of the previous module, questions that students were struggling with, and introductions to the upcoming module are a great way to start without committing to developing content in video form.

What to consider when making your own video
In addition to the recommendations in the guidelines, it is useful to consider the ways in which people take in and process information from text, audio, and visual sources. Research shows that students often benefit from a verbal description of an image, chart, diagram, or other visual more than from reading a text description. However, people cannot read one thing and listen to someone saying something else at the same time and pay attention to both. The theory surrounding this phenomenon is that the brain processes words in both aural and textual form in the same way but processes words and pictures differently (Mayer 2014). Slides that are filled with text for students to read while listening to someone talk about the text (but not read it verbatim) reduces the ability to comprehend and retain either set of information. For a lay description of this concept this NPR story on multitasking (Links to an external site.) provides an overview. When considering audiovisual presentations, it is good to think about how well your content can be presented with images and audio, with text alone, or with audio only.

Whether you are making actual videos showing you in person or other types of presentations you need to consider the shelf-life of your product. Is this a one-off announcement or recap of the class’s work or a piece that you want to reuse in a following semester? Single use, in-the-moment videos are great to address current happenings in the class, talk about concepts that several students seem to be struggling with, or give general feedback on assignments. If the video is only being used once lower quality video is fine - these would normally be done on your webcam - but still take the time to make sure you have good sound and lighting. You may or may not write a script, often a brief outline is all you'll need. You can combine different topics in the same video with impunity, announcing a guest speaker, explaining a point, and reminding students of an upcoming due date all within 5-7 minutes.

If this is a video that you will reuse you will want to consider what you want to do to make the video one that will not look and sound dated. Limiting videos to one topic (likely including subtopics) makes them easier to move around if you restructure the course later on. Spending some time making it look professional up front can reduce the urge to remake them the next semester. These are the videos you’re going to script. The Writing for the Ear section below and using a Readability Checker (Links to an external site.) can help you to sound more conversational and less like you’re reading.

DON'Ts for reusable videos:

- Don’t talk about dates. Say “later in the semester” or “in the next few weeks” instead of “by the end of October” which would be confusing in the spring semester.

- Don’t talk about specific pages or chapters (or possibly also books). New editions come out regularly with new chapter titles and different page numbers.

When you are thinking about video use it is also good to think about the format of the video in addition to the length. Research based on MOOC videos (Links to an external site.) showed that personal videos including a mix of instructor video with PowerPoint or screen capture instead of only voice-over PowerPoint were more engaging.

Why not lecture capture?

Cutting down larger existing in-class lectures into shorter segments were not as engaging as videos recorded for the purpose of serving in an online class. Using existing lecture capture in its entirety is never recommended in any situation as it promotes inefficient, passive learning. As an aid to students in your face-to-face classes, lecture capture can be quite useful but online students can be temporally, affectively, and intellectually disengaged watching a different class, likely from a previous semester, work through their own issues, questions, and logistics.

The first main issue with lecture capture video is engagement. Consider, for example, how you feel watching C-SPAN. People up front are talking to the crowd, trying to explain and convince. Do you feel personally engaged with the person talking? What do you do when they start addressing questions from the audience? Alternatively, consider how you feel watching the video on the previous page. Did you feel personally engaged with the person in that video? Did you feel that he was talking to you and not to an audience that doesn’t include you? Even if an instructor feels comfortable editing video to eliminate ancillary conversation and discussion related to the in-person class such as due dates, testing procedures, etc., the engagement issue remains. Even in the best TED Talks, if the speaker is talking to a live audience and not making eye contact with the camera, the viewer has difficulty even imagining that the speaker is talking to them. Video produced for online courses lets you make and keep eye contact, speak directly to your students, and show your enthusiasm for your content.

The second main issue is focus. Video produced specifically for online class use can be more direct and denser. By thinking through a video script, the approach to the content can be refined, the best examples can be selected, and the video can move from topic to topic in a logical manner, which doesn’t always happen when in-class questions derail your plans. Videos can be structured to rely on students having read or attempted something in advance. As opposed to a live class, online students can stop watching the video and go read the chapter or try the assignment and then come back to the video when they are prepared.

- Visual aids, whether they are slides, images, graphs, or diagrams, need to be clear, uncluttered, and in high enough resolution to not appear pixelated when added to a video.
Online Pedagogy

There are two main places to start when thinking about presentations: visual design (see Designing Presentations) and multimedia: presentations and interactive media. If you are going to invest the time and effort into creating a narrated presentation, take advantage of its visual nature to do something you can't do with a document. Large section of the audience could have read the paper faster and likely with greater comprehension of the content and less inclination to multitask or doze. If you really want to commit to writing great audio lectures, there's a free tutorial designed for broadcast journalists. It's called Writing for the Ear Tutorial. It is a self-directed module with certain sections that won't apply to you but some that are excellent. Renée (who completed the tutorial a few years ago) recommends signing up, launching the tutorial and going directly to the following section.

The main thing to keep in mind is that your video doesn't have to be perfect. Students appreciate the humanness of an instructor when things aren't perfect. If you stop and start, you can also edit parts out and create clips in Kaltura or do some additional editing in Windows Movie Maker or Quicktime Pro (Mac) or using more complex tools like Adobe Premier Elements.

Writing for the Ear

The following section is by Renée Petrina, Instructional Design and Technology Specialist at the Institute for Learning and Teaching Excellence (Link to an external site.) at Indiana University Southeast.

When we lecture in class, students have the opportunity to stop us and ask us to repeat or clarify. We also have the benefit of being able to "read" the class - what aren't they getting? What can I skip over? Also, students are pretty much stuck in the room while we lecture, and we're boxed into a 50- or 75-minute time slot.

But when we move information delivery outside the classroom, the dynamic changes. Students are now accessing lectures without the ability to quickly ask us a question - however, they can rewind the recording if they miss something. But we're also "competing" with all the lovely cat videos out there on the Internet. So we need to be clear and concise when we make our out-of-class materials, and break them up into reasonably-sized units. Researchers at Columbia University found that the average video watching time in their graduate/certificate courses was only four minutes. Researchers at the following section recommended sticking to 6 minutes or less. Researchers also recommended sticking to 6 minutes or less.

Writing for the Ear Tutorial

If you really want to commit to writing great audio lectures, there's a free tutorial designed for broadcast journalists. It's called Writing for the Ear Tutorial. It is a self-directed module with certain sections that won't apply to you but some that are excellent. Renée (who completed the tutorial a few years ago) recommends signing up, launching the tutorial and going directly to Writing the Story - Sentence writing. You could also benefit from some of the Revising the Story information.

When you look at the section on Voicing, consider how it applies to you. Just as radio announcers automatically have authority because they are on the radio, you automatically have authority because of your role as a professor and subject-area expert. By using a conversational voice, you make your audio lectures easier for students to pay attention to and you get your message across more clearly.

Multimedia: Presentations and Interactive Media

Designing Presentations

Watching a presentation where the instructor simply reads the text on the slides is like going to a conference where the presenters read their papers. A large section of the audience could have read the paper faster and likely with greater comprehension of the content and less inclination to multitask or doze. If you are going to invest the time and effort into creating a narrated presentation, take advantage of its visual nature to do something you can't do with a document.

There are two main places to start when thinking about presentations: visual design (see Visual Design for Usability) and multimedia learning theory. Mayer's evidence-based multimedia learning theory is based on research showing that people learn more deeply

- when the same information is not presented in more than one format such as reading text directly from a slide
- from words and pictures than they do from words alone (spoken or in text)
• from graphics and narration alone rather than from graphics, narration, and on-screen text
• when cues are added to highlight key information and organization
• when extraneous text, decorative graphics, extraneous audio such as animation/transition sounds are eliminated.
• when narration is in a conversational style

This blog post pulls together an overview of these strategies from Mayer's book (Links to an external site.) for a quick read.

One additional aspect is Active Processing as students must actively think about what they hear and see in order to integrate it with prior knowledge or adapt their current understanding to take into account the new information. This connects to the Active Learning Module which helps you to think about what students can do to encourage meaningful consideration of content and principles.

Considering accessibility of presentations, presentations saved to Kaltura will also be automatically machine captioned but it is still a good idea to keep a copy of your script with your visuals in case there is a need. If you are using complex visuals think about how you would describe the visual to someone who couldn't see it and keep those notes. They will help the Assistive Technology and Accessibility Center on your campus provide clear visual descriptions.

Visuals and Audio

Visuals

The downloadable reference Online Presentations Guidelines and Best Practices Overview.

Transcript provides a short version of things to keep in mind as you think about your presentations. (Files can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Audio

As Mayer notes and the above video shows, narration works best when it is conversational. While writing a script is highly recommended, be familiar enough with your script to be able to read it without sounding like you're reading. The ECSU faculty who reviewed video examples also noted that many of the videos they watched had speakers who sounded bored or tentative. Lack of enthusiasm shows just as much on a presentation as on a video and if the screen is mainly text attention will wander early and often.

While many people find it uncomfortable to listen to their own voice on a recording, it is important to do it at least the first few times. You may not be consciously aware of verbal habits that may be distracting to your student. Ummms and aahhhs and wells, as well as pens tapping, or computer fans blowing or HVAC noise that you've grown used to can become a focus for listeners, distracting them from the message you are trying to convey.

Eliminating extraneous audio doesn't mean eliminating all other forms of audio. Audio clips serve as examples, to emphasize a point, or to bring other's voices into the story. Music clips can be used to set a tone or suggest a place and time. As with video, using background music can be tricky to make sure the volume is low enough not to distract or mask the narration. In addition, individuals with certain hearing impairments have an extremely hard
time understanding speech over any music so be sure to keep a copy of your presentation without the music if a student needs an alternative version.

Multimedia: Video and Presentation Planning Checklist

Use a Checklist to Guide Your Multi-media Production

Download the checklist from this page as a pdf (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

- What should your students be able to know and do after watching your video?
- What course learning outcome does it support?
- Prepare your script (Don't forget to write for the ear!)
- What visuals support your script?
  - If you're recording video you may not need many visual aids but you do need some. How can you show your students what you mean without using blocks of text.
  - If you're recording a presentation you'll likely have a slide deck. Review the Best Practices for Using PPT in Online Classes (Links to an external site.) and revise or remove slides that contain text directly from your script. If that eliminates a majority of your slides you may want to consider making a presentation that includes video of you.
  - Make sure your images aren't distorted and in the proper height/width proportion.
- Organize your script and visuals into a storyboard (If you're using PPT, put your script for each slide in the notes area for that slide.)
- Add a title slide to the beginning to identify the video and yourself.
- Run through it and time yourself. If it's more than 10-12 minutes look at what you can cut and give them in a text note by the video or think about breaking it into two videos.
  - Don't try to make it shorter by talking faster. Around 150-160 words per minute (a conversational pace) is appropriate for instructional video, any faster and there will begin to be comprehension issues.
  - Remember to pause after anything that you think your students will need a moment to process.
- If you're recording on your own:
  - Do you have microphone that records your voice clearly without any buzz or hiss?
  - Do you have lights placed in front of you, not behind you?
  - Is your webcam positioned high enough so that you're not recording upwards?
  - Are you wearing solid colors?
  - Did you remove anything from yourself and your area that would clank, hum, whir, or squeak? (This includes large pieces of jewelry and pens or pencils if you like to tap them on the desk.)
  - Did you check what is behind you? A cluttered background can be distracting so keep it as clear as possible.
- If you're recording in a studio:
  - Are you wearing solid colors?
  - Did you remove anything from yourself and your area that would clank, hum, whir, or squeak? (this includes large pieces of jewelry and pens or pencils if you like to tap them on the desk)
  - Are you wearing comfortable shoes?
  - Are you wearing something that the microphone pack can clip on to like a waistband, a pocket, or a belt?
  - Did you bring your script or send it to the videographer in advance if you want to use a teleprompter?
- Practice. Really. Very few people get a version they like on the first try and the longer your video is the more chances you may need to start over.
- Record. Try to be as comfortable as possible and let your enthusiasm for your content shine through.
- Watch your own video. This is important. You may be doing distracting things or have a distracting vocal tendency that you never noticed. If the person in the video is continually tapping a pen or saying "so" or "well" at the end of every sentence or rocking back and forth, soon the student will focus so completely on the distraction that they won't be able to fully concentrate on the content of the video. You'll also
  - Hear if you sound like you're reading as opposed to talking to your students.
  - See if you are looking at the camera or at anything else. Looking at the camera means you're looking at your students while you are talking to them. If you engage with them they are more likely to engage with you.

Multimedia: Resources

Additional Information

Fair Use Checklist
Readability Checker (Links to an external site.)

Hibbert, M. (2014). What makes an online instructional video compelling? (Links to an external site.) Educause Review

References


Module 9: Online Presence - What can I do to ensure my students "see" me?

Online Presence: What can I do to ensure my students "see" me?

Learning Objectives

Being actively involved in your online class will promote student success. While online classes provide students with more flexibility and new ways to collaborate, success in the online environment is directly related to how present and engaged the instructor is in the virtual classroom. By the end of this module we hope that you can:

- describe the three types of online presence and
- explain how you could leverage each of them to enhance your course

Table of Contents

- Online Presence: Being "Present" in Your Online Course
- Online Presence: Types of Teaching Presence
- Online Presence: Types of Teaching Presence - Cognitive and Social Presence
- Online Presence: Resources

Online Presence: Being "Present" in Your Online Course

What is Online Presence?

The concept of presence in online teaching builds on the body of work on teaching and learning including Dewey, Chickering and Gamson, and many others studying the psychological and sociological aspects of learning and computer-mediated communication. Several of the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (pdf, 267kb) refer to active presence in the learning environment. For example, good practice:

- encourages student-faculty contact through introductions, announcements, online office hours, and prompt response to student questions and concerns
- encourages cooperation among students through all-class or small-group discussions and well-supported group work using both asynchronous and synchronous collaboration technology
- encourages active learning as discussed in the Active Learning Module
- gives prompt feedback, including both summative feedback and actionable formative feedback
- provides clear instructions regarding due dates and participation emphasizing the need to spend as much (or more) time on an online class as an in-person class. At the same time, be reasonable in your expectations regarding quantity of reading and work within any given time frame.
- provides clear expectations for student work and participation through rubrics and examples, and for communication through a rubric or the Core Rules of Netiquette (Links to an external site.)
- uses multiple means of instruction, engagement, and assessment such as audio, video, screencasts, diagrams, etc. to support Universal Design for Learning (Links to an external site.)

While online classes provide students with more flexibility and new ways to collaborate, success in the online environment is directly related to how present and engaged both the instructor and the students are in the virtual classroom. In the Faculty Focus article, What Online Teachers Need to Know, all four of the basic elements listed there are part of online presence.

Being present in your online class is not only about good practice and supporting student learning and engagement. Instructor presence and communication is what makes the difference between a class being categorized as a distance education class v/s a correspondence course. The US Department of Education and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) have defined the difference between "distance education" and "correspondence education" based on the "regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor." The definition also notes that the interaction cannot be primarily initiated by the student. The instructor must initiate interaction. Simply posting recorded lectures or textual materials online, along with exams or quizzes, will not meet the federal (and HLC) guidelines and will be classified as a correspondence course. Students can't use federal financial aid to pay for correspondence education (Links to an external site.). Online courses, for which students may use financial aid, must have significant faculty-student interaction.

Pasadena Community College offers some guidelines for regular effective contact with students (Links to an external site.):

Instructor Initiated Interactions

- Design daily or weekly assignments and projects that promote collaboration among students.
- Model course netiquette at the beginning of the semester with instructor-guided introductions.
- Pose questions in the discussion boards which encourage various types of interaction and critical thinking skills among all course participants.
- Monitor content activity to ensure that students participate fully and discussions remain on topic.

Online Pedagogy 55
- Create a specific forum for questions regarding course assignments.
- Ask students for feedback about the course on a regular basis and revise content as needed.

Frequency & Timeliness of Interactions
- Maintain an active daily presence, particularly during the beginning weeks of a course.
- Give frequent and substantive feedback throughout the course.
- Let students know what response time they should expect for questions/inquiries (e.g., 24-48 hours).

Expectations for Interactions
- Explain course policy regarding student-initiated contact (where to post questions, assignments, etc.) in the syllabus.
- Outline and explain netiquette in initial course documents.
- Clarify important dates, such as assignment and assessment deadlines not only in the beginning but also throughout the course.

Absences from Interactions
- Inform students immediately of the absence should an illness, family emergency or other unexpected event prevent continuing regular effective contact for a prolonged period of time (>1 week).
- Inform student of whom to contact with course questions during the absence.
- Let students know when regular effective instructor-initiated contact will resume.

Community of Inquiry Model
Garrison, Anderson, and Archer developed the Community of Inquiry Model (Links to an external site.) to describe the ways in which multiple types of online presence interact in an online course. The following interactive tool describes the inter-related aspects of presence based on the Community of Inquiry Model.

Transcript of Community of Inquiry Video. (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Online Presence: Types of Teaching Presence
As you can see from the previous section, teaching, cognitive, and social presence can be leveraged in a variety of ways. Let's take a closer look at how you could use each of them in your online course.

Teaching Presence
Teaching presence includes both the planning and forethought that go into building your course and what you do “in the moment” when interacting with your students. The parts of teaching presence that occur while the course is in session include facilitation of discourse and direct instruction.

Direct instruction is the more straightforward of the two and would include pre-developed presentations, assessing student work and providing instructive feedback, diagnosing misconceptions, clarifying concepts, and referring students to additional resources or practice opportunities.

Facilitating discourse is more than simply requiring students to post to a discussion and reply to others. It involves regularly reading and providing...
feedback on student postings, encouraging participation, moving the discussion forward when it stalls or gets off track, identifying and drawing out areas of agreement and disagreement, pointing out linkages, and helping students articulate shared understandings. Immediacy behaviors can be helpful when facilitating discourse. Things like referring to students by name, encouraging student-student conversation, sharing personal examples from your own research, travel, or conversations with other faculty contribute to both social and teaching presence.

Cormier and Siemans (2010) also suggest several roles instructors can take to provide active teaching presence in an online course:

- Amplifying - Drawing attention to important ideas/concepts, both in the course materials and in student comments or other work.
- Curating - Selecting and arranging readings, videos, and other resources to scaffold concepts
- Aggregating - Finding and displaying patterns in discussions and other communications
- Modeling - Demonstrate the skills you expect from your students - both in terms of interaction and analysis

It is important to stay present throughout the course - not just at the beginning of the semester. Maintaining continual instructor presence during the course, particularly during natural activity lulls, keeps students motivated and engaged. Students need the structure and leadership of your active teaching presence to move from surface learning to a deeper level of engaged learning. This can take the form of:

- defining clear expectations for student work and interactions,
- selecting and sequencing manageable sections of content,
- facilitating discourse with engaging questions and challenges to test understanding, as well as by modeling appropriate contributions to the discussion,
- structuring both collaborative and individual activities that are aligned with desired learning outcomes, and
- assessing learning at a deeper, more complex level and providing feedback on learning processes.

To hear more about approaches to online presence please watch the following video from the Educational Technology Support Team at the University of British Columbia.

- [Transitioning to Teaching Online: Presence](#)

### Feedback as an Example of Teaching Presence

Giving feedback on assignments is a critical part of the direct instruction component of teaching presence. It provides a natural opportunity for one-to-one teaching presence while supporting student learning. Getzlaf, et al (2009) describe effective feedback as

- a mutual process involving both student and instructor
- providing constructive guidance that builds confidence
- guiding through explicit expectations and ongoing coaching
- meeting mutually established timelines
- being applicable to future situations

In an online course it is important for students to get frequent feedback on how they are doing. Are they learning what they are supposed to be learning? Are they achieving the learning outcomes? The most effective way to ensure that students get the feedback they need to stay on track is through a comprehensive, balanced assessment strategy that includes both formative and summative assessments. You can even have students provide peer feedback if you supervise it well.

There are several ways to provide feedback in Blackboard: **individual** written, audio, or video feedback through Speed Grader or via an Inbox message; **group** feedback in the group space via a group announcement or discussion forum; and **aggregated** class feedback via whole class announcements or discussion forums.

However you choose to provide feedback, it is important that the feedback be provided in a timely manner and that it include specific suggestions for improvement. For more information on providing good feedback see [7 Keys to Effective Feedback (Links to an external site.)](#).

### Being Present from the Beginning: Introducing yourself to your class

While being present throughout the course is critical, starting as you mean to go on is also important. Providing a personal video introduction at the start of the course allows students to see you as a human being which can mitigate the anonymity of text-based conversation and encourage human connections.

One of the first things you normally do in your class is introduce yourself. In an online class, introductions are even more important as they are one of
the first points of contact with you as an instructor and likely the first one where they see you visually. Video introductions help your students feel more connected to you and lets them know there is a real, live faculty member behind the course. They support teaching presence, which is essential to online success. Research on video introductions (Links to an external site.) indicates that they can improve student engagement at the beginning of the course and encourage positive student perceptions of you as the instructor.

By beginning the semester by personally introducing yourself and sharing your background, expertise, and interests in a welcoming manner, you can show your students that you are approachable and interested in their learning. Creating a basic introduction video is also a great way to start thinking about using video and audio more generally, which diversifies the methods of communication and information delivery in your course. Simple webcam recordings are fine as long as you make sure your lighting and audio are good. See the Video and Presentation Planning Checklist (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article) for more information.

Online Presence: Types of Teaching Presence - Cognitive and Social Presence

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence is central to successful student learning. The quality of cognitive presence reflects the quality and quantity of critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and construction of meaning occurring in student↔student and student↔faculty interactions. You can model and support cognitive presence in your interactions with students in discussions, assignment feedback, and other communications.

Dewey's Practical Inquiry Model Outline (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Cognitive presence is based on the iterative relationship between personal understanding and shared dialogue. Building on the work of John Dewey, Garrison proposed the Practical Inquiry Model shown here. This model integrates these two aspects in a cycle beginning with a question or puzzle - called a triggering event - or just a general awareness that something isn't making sense. The learner then explores the available information and alternatives to make sense of the problem and connects this new information to previously learned concepts. Finally, the learner takes action to solve the problem or answer the question based on their newly integrated understanding.

The overlap between cognitive presence and teaching presence, labeled "Regulating Learning" in the Community of Inquiry diagram, focuses on the co-regulation of learning and metacognition by both the instructor and the students. Paz and Pereira (2015) found several categories within Regulating Learning including:

- Confirming understanding of tasks
- Assessing learning strategies and work processes and/or proposing corrections to those processes
- Reminding others of tasks and encouraging them to focus on or contribute to tasks, resources, and activities
- Helping with tasks, processes, or products of learning
- Managing the movement through learning phases or tasks

Students also exhibit some of these aspects as self-regulation and as co-regulation in groups.

Depending on the course and the instructor, the amount of learning regulation will vary. More self-directed graduate students will need less co-regulation than first year undergraduate students. For example, effectively moderating online discussion is an important strategy for supporting cognitive presence. Moderating and modeling the way in which a beginner in the field should be thinking through a question, problem, or case may occur more often in undergraduate classes as the students begin to learn how to learn in the field. It is important to realize that simply interacting with others or with the content does not automatically translate into critical discourse or the integration of ideas into meaningful constructs (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005).

Social Presence

Social presence is important especially at the beginning of the semester when students are getting to know and trust both you and one another. If
students can make interpersonal connections with others, they are more likely to engage with the course and the content. Indicators of Social Presence include

- **Affective responses** such as expressing emotion and using humor
- **Interactive responses** such as continuing a discussion thread, referring to other students in a message or post, asking questions, and expressing agreement or appreciations
- **Cohesive responses** such as using other students’ names, using inclusive pronouns to refer to their group or class, and engaging in small talk

The overlap of social and teaching presence, labeled as “Setting Climate” in the Community of Inquiry diagram, includes critical aspects of building a positive learning environment. Parker and Harrington's (2015) research indicates four main aspects.

- **Creating a usable learning environment.**
- **Building positive rapport** by using open, friendly communication, being approachable, and showing respect, courtesy, and patience
- **Engendering a sense of belonging** by addressing students by name, encouraging participation, and publicly or privately recognizing progress and achievement
- **Promoting a sense of purpose** by regularly monitoring student performance, providing constructive and timely feedback, and clearly articulating course goals.

Students also exhibit some of these aspects when working in groups. Behaviors such as monitoring each other’s progress and holding each other accountable for work quality and deadlines in groups sets the climate for their group. Effective group work also hinges on trust and comfort level with other students so building positive rapport and a sense of belonging is vital to setting group norms and participating in efficient collaboration.

In an online class, it is difficult but not impossible for students to get to know each other and you on a more personal level. Providing a space for students to introduce themselves to the class - preferably with video - is a good start to help students see each other as a “real people” and not just a name on a screen. Students can embed video of themselves into Blackboard Discussions or you can use VoiceThread for an alternative approach.

**More Examples of Online Presence**

Transcript - Huber's Successful Online Engagement Strategies; Transcript - Huffman's Online Enhancement of Student Professor Communication  (Files can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

**Online Presence: Resources**

**Additional Information**

Balancing Act: Managing Instructor Presence and Workload When Creating an Interactive Community of Learners. (Links to an external site.)

Creating a Sense of Instructor Presence in the Online Classroom (Links to an external site.)


Pelletier, P. (2013). What online teachers need to know. Faculty Focus

**References**


Parker, J., & Herrington, J. (2015). Setting the climate in an authentic online community of learning (Links to an external site.). In proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education 2015 Annual Conference, University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, WA, USA.

Paz, J., & Pereira, A. (2015). Regulation of learning as distributed teaching presence in the community of inquiry framework (Links to an external site.). In the Proceedings of Technology, Colleges, and Community Online Conference 2015: The Future is Now. Honolulu, HI


Module 10: Teaching in the Virtual Classroom - How is it different and what can I do to make it better?

Teaching in the Virtual Classroom: How is it different and what can I do to make it better?

Keeping a sense of balance is key when teaching online. Take advantage of strategies to boost your efficiency and manage your workload while establishing an engaging, effective learning community in your online course.

Learning Objectives

There are many aspects of teaching online that may appear similar on the surface to teaching on campus. However, as you start teaching online, faculty discover there are significant differences that need to be handled in different ways. By the end of this module we hope that you will be able to:

- plan and manage different types of participation in your course
- draft your expectations for your students and yourself in your course
- develop a realistic plan to balance your time while teaching your online course

Table of Contents

- Teaching Online: Keeping Perspective
- Teaching Online: Communicating with Your Students
- Teaching Online: Group Work and Participation
- Teaching Online: Thinking about Participation
- Teaching Online: Resources for Teaching in a Virtual Classroom
- How do I...?

Teaching Online: Keeping Perspective

What's so different about teaching online?

Keys to Teaching Online - Transcript (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article)

Faculty in colleges and universities across the country often learn about teaching and classroom management informally through observing faculty whose classes they enjoyed taking as a student, discussions with colleagues, or consultations with your teaching and learning center staff. When you begin to teach online, your exemplars and experiences from the face-to-face classroom may not be as helpful when you interact primarily with students asynchronously at a distance. While you’ll find many little differences and make many little adjustments as you teach online, there are several major areas of difference that you’ll want to make sure to consider.

Time and expectation management
Keeping a sense of balance is key when teaching online.

One of the most common issues that arises when teaching online is a feeling that there's just not enough time in the day to do what needs to be done. Email from students needs to be answered. Assignments need to be graded and grades posted in a timely manner. Groups may need to be monitored, technology issues managed, or replies to discussion questions posted.

The main areas that can cause challenges for instructors are:

- saying they will reply to messages in a particular time frame but taking longer in reality
- saying they will grade and provide feedback in a particular time frame but taking longer in reality
- telling students to reply to others' posts with substantive comments and their own comments are "nice point" or "good example"

If students come to expect sporadic, delayed communication from the instructor, and lack of substantive participation they begin to wonder why they should put forth the effort to be a timely and active participant in the class.

A good way to keep your time commitments under control is to manage expectations from the beginning of the course - both your students’ expectations and your own. You may not expect to be answering email at 3AM now, but when you find yourself doing just that a month into the course, it's important to take a step back and review the parameters you originally set. If your syllabus states that you will answer email within 24 hours or that grades will be posted within one week of the assignment deadline, that doesn't mean that you have to answer email as soon as it comes in and grade on the day the assignment is due. For some people, the psychological stress of an email backlog is harder to deal with than the backlog itself. Knowing yourself and how you prefer to work will help you set expectations and boundaries that are reasonable for both you and your students.

Keep in mind that you aren't the only source of technical support for your students. There will always be students with technology challenges in any online class. Troubleshooting technical issues can eat up time if you allow it. The most important thing to keep in mind regarding the tools and technology used in online classes is that you are not the only source of technical support for your students. Providing clear, tested instructions - using video if possible - will help reduce the number of questions. The Blackboard Guides (Links to an external site.) are an excellent source of illustrated and video instructions for tools and tasks within Blackboard.

University Information Technology Services provides 24/7 phone and live chat support for distance students as well as walk-in support for on-campus students. If students are experiencing technical difficulties with a university system such as Blackboard or a university-supported product such as Microsoft Word, you can direct them to the Support Center on your campus.

If you have the opposite issue of avoiding messages and grading, setting aside regular chunks of time throughout the week to respond to email, grade, and interact in discussions is helpful. Treat this time as a commitment the same way you would to physically go teach a face-to-face class. Dedicate a portion of this time to open online office hours if you need external motivation to stick to a schedule. One way to make sure that important things don't fall through the cracks in all the busy-ness is to use a check sheet like the Assessing Online Facilitation Instrument (Links to an external site.) from Humboldt State University. This form breaks out the key Managerial, Social, Pedagogical, and Technical responsibilities of an online facilitator before, during, and after the course.

One last thing, if you have a tendency to lose track of due dates and office hours/student meetings that you have on your Blackboard calendar, you can add your Blackboard calendar to Outlook by subscribing to your Blackboard Calendar. This will show you all the calendar items for all the courses you are teaching side by side with your Outlook calendar.

What about grading jail?

When teaching online, some instructors feel the need to significantly increase the amount of graded assignments to more closely assess student learning. While ongoing knowledge checks can be a sound strategy, if you have to manually review each one it can lead to grading overload. To ease grading overload, Blackboard's Needs Grading Guide (Links to an external site.) allows you to view and organize all submitted assessments for grading.

Rubrics

Rubrics are both assessment tools for faculty and learning tools for students that can ease anxiety about the grading process for both parties. Creating rubrics does require a substantial time investment upfront, but this process will result in reduced time spent grading or explaining assignment criteria down the road.

Research indicates that rubrics:

- Encourage students to think critically by linking assignments with learning objectives.
- Increase transparency and consistency in grading by helping to normalize the work of multiple graders such as across multiple sections of a course or with TAs sharing grading tasks in large courses.
- Reduce student concerns about subjectivity or arbitrariness in grading.
- Increase the efficiency of grading by reducing the time you spend grading assignments and supporting the provision of timely feedback which has a positive impact on the learning process.
- Support formative assessment when coupled with other forms of feedback (e.g., brief, individualized comments) to show students how to improve.
- Enhance the quality of self- and peer-assessment by giving students a clear sense of what constitutes different levels of performance.
For more information on rubrics please visit the Cornell's Center for Teaching Innovation Rubric Resource Page (Links to an external site.).

The Rubric Tool in Blackboard (Links to an external site.) is an easy way to both share rubrics with your students and speed up your grading. Once you create a rubric associated with an assignment, that rubric will appear when grading the assignment (Links to an external site.), where you can click on the rating the student earned for each category, adjust points within a points range for that rating, and make comments specifically to that criteria. This is especially helpful if you have TAs/IAs grading for you and you want to make sure they include all of the criteria in each student's feedback.

Other Grading Options

In some courses, an easy way to speed up grading is to develop a bank of comments. When you have taught a course multiple times, you know the common errors and misconceptions that occur. To save re-typing basically the same comment over and over, save the comment either with your answer key or in a more general comment file for the assessment or course and then copy and paste it in, personalizing it as needed. For more suggestions on streamlining grading, see Ten Tips for More Efficient and Effective Grading (Links to an external site.).

If you find that, despite your best efforts, you are having trouble keeping up with grading and interaction, it's all right to stop and re-assess what you are doing and what you are asking your students to do. A mid-semester check-in with your students via an anonymous survey is a good way to find out if they are also feeling overwhelmed, lacking connection, not understanding what is expected of them, or needing a different kind of feedback.

For more thoughts on the topic, see Time Management Reminders that Boost Efficiency, Peace of Mind (Links to an external site.) (Faculty Focus Article).

Teaching Online: Communicating with Your Students

Communication

Communicating with your students is the core of an online class. Active and timely communication supports teaching presence and when instructors participate supportively and frequently students perceive the instructor as both enthusiastic and as an expert in the field. It's also more than student satisfaction on course evaluations. The US Department of Education (Links to an external site.) and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) (Links to an external site.) have defined the difference between "distance education" and "correspondence education" based on the "regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor."

If interaction is not substantive or is primarily initiated by the student it will be categorized as a correspondence course and students may not use federal financial aid to pay for correspondence education (Links to an external site.). Online courses, for which students may use financial aid, must have significant faculty-student interaction. Simply posting recorded lectures or textual materials online, along with exams or quizzes, will not meet the federal and HLC guidelines.

Starting out as you mean to go along by communicating in a welcoming and supportive manner from the beginning with a personal and course introduction, an approachable syllabus, and an interactive introduction discussion sets the tone for the class. However, once you get into the semester, faculty can have questions about response time and whether to use individual or group communication. Generally speaking, response to emails and other student questions should occur within 24 hours. Some faculty prefer to disconnect over the weekend, however, that is the time when most students are working and questions may arise. In that situation, you may want to indicate that you will respond to urgent questions only over the weekend. If you are getting the same questions repeatedly, instead of sending an email response to each student it is often more efficient to post an announcement to the entire class addressing the question. If what you are communicating would be helpful to more than a handful of students it is more efficient to share it with the entire group through an announcement or a Q&A discussion forum.

Moderating discussion forums

Transcript - Effective Online Discussions. (File can also be downloaded under Attachments at the bottom of this article.)
Class discussion in a live classroom - either as a whole or in small groups - is a great way to get students to interact with one another and with the content. In an online course, discussion forums are often the main means of whole class communication. Whether you use formal discussion prompts or provide informal opportunities for collaboration or topical discussion, moderating these forums is different than moderating a whole class discussion in an in-person classroom.

Despite rumors to the contrary, it is not necessary to reply to every post every student makes in your discussion forum. Excessive faculty posting can preemptively close down conversations. The question becomes "how much is too much and how much is not enough?" The answer to that question can vary based on the course content, the level of the students, and the interest of the instructor, but commenting on around 1/3 of all substantive posts is a reasonable place to begin. Making sure to spread your comments over the course of the week is also important to encourage students to actively and consistently participate over time.

As a good rule, if you will not give participation credit to a student for simply posting "I agree" or "good job," then it's not helpful to model those sort of posts in your own discussion forum participation. As the expert in the subject, you will surely have additional thoughts, further data, or reflective questions to add to any discussion. You can also pull together threads of ideas or themes that you see across several students' posts and make connections back to the course text or primary concepts. Many faculty use some form of Socratic or reflective questioning in their face-to-face classes and similar strategies can also work online. If you publicly value substantive discussion by giving points for it and modeling it in the forums, students will do the work. Just make sure that when you post additional thoughts and questions you're scaffolding their learning and not talking over their heads.

In addition to moderating, another - often overlooked - aspect of fostering substantive discussion is to make sure your discussion prompt is actually a discussion prompt and not a regular assignment in disguise. "List three reasons why X happened. Justify your answers from the text." isn't actually a discussion prompt. It's a question that the student answers and then walks away having proved to the instructor that they read the book. If you just want to know that they read the book, try a reading quiz in the Quizzes tool. If you want students to discuss why X happened, phrasing the prompt in a way that opens the door for discussion, such as "Based on the text, what do you think is the most logical reason that X happened? Explain your reasoning. Reply to at least two other classmates who suggested different reasons and explain whether or not you think that both reasons could have influenced X. Make sure to reply appropriately to anyone who replies substantively to any of your posts." Instructions like this provide a rationale for replying to one another and provides a reasonable avenue for interaction. It also provides you with easier opportunities to participate by highlighting the complexities of pointing to one single antecedent to an event or movement. For more on using discussion forums, see Discussion Board Assignments: Alternatives to the Question-and-Answer Format (Links to an external site.), (Faculty Focus Article)

When discussion goes bad: Conflict in an online course

Conflict - whether overt or covert - is something no one enjoys dealing with in the classroom. In a face-to-face class you may be able to quell inappropriate behavior with a sharp look or a quick word of warning after class. In an online class inappropriate behavior may be harder to spot and harder to combat due to the text-based nature of most communication. Managing Controversy in the Online Classroom (Links to an external site.) provides an overview of proactive and reactive ways to avoid controversy and handle it when it does appear.

To avoid conflict that stems from incivility, beginning with Core Rules of Netiquette (Links to an external site.), is a good place to start. Reminding everyone that there is another human being on the receiving end of each message can help students calibrate their reactions to the context. Asking students to participate in discussions by posting video comments also reinforces the reality that they are talking to other real people. Mintu-Wimsatt, Kernek, and Lozada (2010) (Links to an external site.) suggested a list of netiquette items for a graduate online class which includes:

- Do not dominate any discussion.
- Never make fun of someone’s ability to read or write.
- Use correct spelling, grammar, and plain English
- Keep an "open-mind" and be willing to express even your minority opinion.
- Think before you push the "Send" button.
- Do not hesitate to ask for feedback

When conflict occurs, Horton (2006) recommends some options for instructors:

1. If you have taught the course before you may be able to anticipate problems and have a consistent, thought-out response ready .
2. Include netiquette requirements in the syllabus and course introduction. Many learners may not know the conventions and expectations for online learning. Enforce policies consistently.
3. When you come across unacceptable behavior, do not respond without taking a moment to think about the behavior in context. For example, if students are experiencing frustration with the course or the tools respond to both the usability issue and the way they expressed it.
4. Differentiate between first-time violators and serious or repeat offenders. What can be used as a learning experience versus what requires disciplinary action?
5. Help students learn to disagree professionally and politely. If they are used to the sort of disagreement and “debate” that occurs on Facebook, instructions and modeling appropriate ways to give and respond to legitimate criticism may be helpful.

Teaching Online: Group Work and Participation

Group Work Online

Group work is challenging for many students in a face-to-face class. When you add the extra layers of complication from technology and asynchronous communication, it is not surprising that some faculty simply avoid assigning group work in an online class. However, group work provides students with opportunities to connect with one another, lessening the isolation often felt in online classes.

The Groups tool in Blackboard allows for multiple levels of group work if you would like to start small or go big. At the basic level, students can be assigned to smaller groups simply for discussion. When classes are large it can be cumbersome to have whole-class discussions so breaking students up into smaller discussion groups, either randomly or by interest area, can produce better dialogue. Still within the realm of participation, these discussion groups can also be tasked with coming to consensus on a problem or question and reporting out to the whole class.

Group assignments such as papers, presentations, or cases can benefit from the Group space Blackboard creates for each student group. Groups automatically have a space to discuss, share files, and collaborate which you can access but other student groups cannot. For more on using Blackboard to manage student groups, see the Groups section in the Blackboard Instructor Guide.

Group work can be made easier for both students and faculty if expectations and norms are set in advance. Providing netiquette rules, a rubric for participation, peer evaluation, and attaching points to positive group interaction will motivate most students to participate at a meaningful level especially if the group assignment is relevant and authentic. It also helps to start group work after the first few weeks in the semester to allow students time to acclimate to the course and get to know each other through introductions. Both Buhdai (2016) and Chang and Kang (2016) recommend keeping groups small and odd-numbered. In addition, Buhdai also recommends intentionally creating teams, setting clear expectations for individual contributions, and monitoring the online group space to catch issues before they escalate.

In Blackboard, when you set up an assignment as a group assignment you have the option of giving all students the same grade or grading each student individually. If you want to give everyone the same grade on the assignment but adjust for participation there are a couple of common ways to do that. The cleanest way is to set the group assignment to give all students the same grades so that you only have to provide feedback in one place where all group members can see it, and then add a second assignment or quiz where students rate their group members on a provided rubric. You can either set the main assignment to be worth a smaller number of points (say 10%-15% less) and make the participation peer evaluation worth that number of points or you can set the main assignment to be the original number of points and the participation peer evaluation to be worth 0 so anything you add for participation is effectively extra credit. Note that you can give students negative points on assignments, which, in this case, would effectively dock points from the group assignment. If students do an acceptable job participating with their group they would receive no modifier but students who went beyond expectation would receive a bonus and those who did not participate would be docked points.

As far as a participation rubric, these can be as simple or as complex as you’d like them to be. They range from something as basic as:

- Rate your team members (including yourself) on a scale of 1 to 10 on
  - Quality of participation
  - Quantity of participation
  - Timeliness of participation

or

Out of 100 points possible assign a number of points to each participant in your group (including yourself) indicating the quality of their participation in the project.

To something more complex such as this rubric from Carnegie Mellon (pdf, 3.4M). Other sample rubrics and peer evaluation forms are available from the Carnegie Mellon Eberly Center on Teaching Excellence.

Chang and Kang (2016) describe and address the challenges facing group work online, specifically looking at aspects such as group size, responsibility, coordination, structure, and leadership. One way to address the common challenge of lack of commitment and responsibility by some group members is to structure the assignment as cooperative group work instead of collaborative group work. Working cooperatively, students are engaged with and responsible for separate parts of the project. The instructor can define the individual tasks and work products and then let the group choose who does what or assign individual tasks to specific students.
An additional option is to assign functional roles to students in groups with responsibility for certain process-oriented tasks. Roles such as starter, elaborator, source-searcher, theoretician, questioner, devil's advocate, moderator, and wrapper are common to discussion-based and case study projects. Assigning roles in advance allows students to develop group cohesion and feelings of responsibility sooner and decreases the amount of time it takes groups to coordinate who is doing what, allowing them to get started on actual task-focused work faster.

The following three-part series on online group work from Online Learning Insights briefly explains several effective strategies for using group work in online classes.

- Five Elements that Promote Learner Collaboration and Group Work in Online Courses (Links to an external site.)
- Five Essential Skills Instructors Need to Facilitate Online Group Work & Collaboration (Links to an external site.)
- Student Perceptions of Online Group Work: What They Really Think and How to Make it Work (Links to an external site.)

**Grading Participation**

When teaching on campus it’s not uncommon to have attendance or participation factor into a course grade. It’s fairly straightforward - students show up for class, they pay attention, they may speak up in a class discussion or work in a small group. You give them a grade at the end of the semester.

Online classes with no synchronous components can be trickier. Depending on the size of the class and the course content, some instructors may substitute a quiz over the reading or video for the week for attendance. Others may use small group discussions focusing on a question, case, or problem where each group must report out their solution. Others may use small group or full class discussions to delve deeper into the materials and help students make connections to their lives and the world around them.

While participation and engagement are crucial for learning, when that participation becomes fixed in a text form, grading quality and level of participation can be a challenge. Rubrics for discussions can be an effective way of setting everyone's expectations for participation and making participation grades more transparent by benchmarking quantity of posts, originality and quality of posts, and responsiveness to peers.

Here are some example rubrics to help you think about what you might write for your own class.

- General Grading Rubric for Class Discussion (Links to an external site.) - Google Doc from Online Learning Insights (Links to an external site.)
- Rubric (Links to an external site.) from Modeling and Assessing Online Discussions for Faculty Development (Links to an external site.) presentation at Mid-Atlantic Regional Educause Conference
- Rubric from Rutgers University (Links to an external site.)

**Teaching Online: Thinking about Participation**

Setting reasonable, easy-to-understand, and easy-to-monitor expectations for participation is often a crucial step to get and keep students engaged. Making participation interesting, authentic, and clearly tied to learning outcomes can improve student motivation to participate and engage.

**How clearly can you describe your expectations for participation?**

When thinking about what you want your students to do and when, how, and to what extent you want them to do it, it’s easy to either be very vague or overly-prescriptive. Walking the line between structure and autonomy can be tricky when you want to encourage sincere inquiry and discourse.

1. Reviewing the participation rubrics in the course and any others you have seen from your colleagues or found online, what categories of participation do you feel are most important to emphasize in your course?
2. Once you have identified categories, describe what acceptable, not-acceptable, and outstanding look like in each category. (For example, acceptable timeliness might be posting on the due date, not acceptable might be posting after the due date, and outstanding might be posting at least a day before the due date. Describe it in a way that you can justifiably assign a student's participation to a particular category. Descriptions such as “good, solid work,” “good work,” and “not good work” aren’t specific enough to be of help to the student in understanding what is expected of them or to you in grading what the students are doing.)
3. Now think about an activity where you want students to actively discuss something. Make sure that your activity includes instructions and prompts that encourage discussion as opposed to a series of individual monologues.
4. When you have an outline of a rubric and a discussion activity ask someone who does not teach, a friend, family member, administrative staff person, etc. to review your the items and ask them to explain what they think you are asking them to do in their own words. Revise as needed to make sure your intent is understood.
Teaching Online: Resources for Teaching in a Virtual Classroom

Additional Information

Bart, M (2010). How to design effective online group work activities (Links to an external site.). Faculty Focus.

Torosyan, R. (2011). Time management reminders that boost efficiency and peace of mind. (Links to an external site.) Faculty Focus.


Rovai, A. P. (2007). Facilitating online discussions effectively (pdf, 263k) (Links to an external site.). The Internet and Higher Education, 10, 77-88

References


Budhai, S. S. (2016). Designing effective team projects in online courses (Links to an external site.). Faculty Focus.


How do I . . .?

As a reminder, there is a basic overview of each of the main Blackboard tools in the Getting Started with Blackboard Knowledgebase. (Go back to top)
Developing an Online Course

If you are building your online course from scratch or substantially revising a course these first eight Modules are the place to begin. The final two Modules offer ideas and recommendations for thinking through important teaching concerns such as online presence, interacting with your students, and managing classroom issues such as group work, grading, participation, and conflict online.

If this is your first time with an online course, please start with:

- **How are Online Classes Different?**

  You may have heard the recommendation to start with the end in mind - the desired learning outcomes for your students. While that's a very valid recommendation, there is more to the process than just having a solid starting point.

- **Designing an Online Course: Where do I start?**

  Assessments that are aligned with your learning outcomes provide reliable feedback about student learning and reinforce to students what needs to be mastered. A balanced assessment strategy in online courses can prevent surprise grades and the drama that often accompanies them.

- **Active and Interactive Learning: What can my students "do" online?**

  Active learning is more than clicking links and buttons. Learning activities that require students to actively do something thoughtful with the concepts in your course (individually or in pairs or groups) improves learning and knowledge retention.

- **Structuring Content: How can I make, find, and use online resources?**

  Your content provides the necessary information and tools that students need to complete activities and reach learning outcomes. While it can be easy to find and add more and more content to an online course, it's important to ensure that content actually supports your learning outcomes.

- **Online Presence: What can I do to ensure my students "see" me?**

  Being actively involved in your online class will promote student success. While online classes provide students with more flexibility and new ways to collaborate, success in the online environment is directly related to how present and engaged the instructor is in the virtual classroom.

- **Usability and Visual Design: What can I do to help my students see where to go and what to do?**

  Designing for usability helps everyone. If the course and course materials are usable from the start it helps maintain student motivation and also reduces the amount of time you spend re-explaining and fixing during the course.

- **Accessibility: How can I help my students who use assistive technology?**

  You can significantly improve accessibility in your course by following three relatively simple practices as you develop course materials and by keeping accessibility in mind as you think about activities and assessments.

- **Multimedia: How can I make it, find it, and use it in my online class?**

  Video, audio, and images are important to include in an online course to provide alternative means of communication for students who may have reading difficulties or simply learn easier through visual and auditory channels. Media you create also provides an additional channel for teaching presence and reinforces that you are a human being and not just a name on a screen.

- **Structuring the Course: How do I put it all together and explain it to my students?**

  A well-organized course provides a clear path for students to progress. By providing structure and clear, welcoming instructions and information students will be more comfortable and confident and will ask fewer logistical questions.

Now that you've built it - what about teaching?

- **Teaching in the Virtual Classroom: How is it different and what can I do to make it better?**

  Keeping a sense of balance is key when teaching online. Take advantage of strategies to boost your efficiency and manage your workload while establishing an engaging, effective learning community in your online course.
Teaching an Online Course

If your online course is already developed and you are looking for ideas and recommendations to help you maximize the experience, both for you and your students, these first six Modules are the place to begin. If you are also considering revising your course to improve the teaching-learning experience, the course design Modules at the bottom of the page will help you to get started.

If this is your first time with an online course, please start with:

How are Online Classes Different?

- **Online Presence: What can I do to make sure my students "see" me?**

  Being actively involved in your online class will promote student success. While online classes provide students with more flexibility and new ways to collaborate, success in the online environment is directly related to how present and engaged the instructor is in the virtual classroom.

- **Structuring the Course: How do I put it all together and explain it to my students?**

  A well-organized course provides a clear path for students to progress. By providing structure and clear, welcoming instructions and information students will be more comfortable and confident and will ask fewer logistical questions.

- **Teaching in the Virtual Classroom: How is it different and what can I do to make it better?**

  Group work, participation, class discussions, and both your and your students' expectations all look different online. Take advantage of strategies to boost your efficiency and manage your workload while establishing an engaging, effective learning community in your online course.

- **Usability and Visual Design: What can I do to help my students see where to go and what to do?**

  Designing for usability helps everyone. If the course and course materials are usable from the start it helps maintain student motivation and also reduces the amount of time you spend re-explaining and fixing during the course.

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How can a course design support your teaching?

- **Designing an Online Course: Where do I start?**

  You may have heard the recommendation to start with the end in mind - the desired learning outcomes for your students. While that's a very valid recommendation, there is more to the process than just having a solid starting point.

- **Online Assessment: How do I know my students are learning?**

  Assessments that are aligned with your learning outcomes provide reliable feedback about student learning and reinforce to students what needs to be mastered. A balanced assessment strategy in online courses can prevent surprise grades and the drama that often accompanies them.

- **Active and Interactive Learning: What can my students "do" online?**

  Active learning is more than clicking links and buttons. Learning activities that require students to actively do something thoughtful with the concepts in your course (individually or in pairs or groups) improves learning and knowledge retention.

- **Structuring Content: How can I make, find, and use online resources?**

  Your content provides the necessary information and tools that students need to complete activities and reach learning outcomes. While it can be easy to find and add more and more content to an online course, it’s important to ensure that content actually supports your learning outcomes.
As a follow up from the workshop Apple conducted on iOS 11, they provide a series of videos that cover the items demonstrated:

- [How to do even more with iPad and iOS 11](#)

The series includes features that were covered in the session:

- The new dock.
- Managing files and folders with the new Files app.
- Multitasking.
- Scan, Sign and Send documents with Notes.

The series also includes additional features not covered in the session:

- Using the Apple Pencil.
- Using Multitouch.
- Converting hand written notes into type.
- Copy and paste across different devices.

The resource also contains links to the [iPad User Guide](#) and [Tips and Tricks](#).

Instructions on setting up your iPad or iPhone to screen record, were covered in the session and can be found here:

- [How to Record the Screen in on iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch (iOS11)](#)

The Record button will be displayed in your customizable control center. Tap to start the recording and tap again when you want to stop and the video. It is saved and available in your camera roll.

Additionally, apple presented two apps for iOS:

- **Explain Everything** is a whiteboard and screencasting app that can be used on the iPad and iPhone. It also offers a version for Windows and Android. It allows you to capture, annotate, record and share your ideas.
- **Clips** is a free app from Apple for iPhone and iPad, which allows you to make short videos and also to use live titles. Simply speak while recording, and text automatically appears onscreen, synced with your voice. Tap the clip to easily adjust text, add punctuation, or change the style of your title. Consider this for a short introductory video prior to the start of class.

Apple also shared information on the [Apple Teacher program](#), which inspires educators to build skills around Apple technology. The program offers free self-paced professional learning in the Apple Teacher Learning Center. It’s a quality learning experience with a clearly defined learning path that's an easy, on-the-go way to learn more about Apple product.

- It is designed to spark new ideas for teachers and inspire them to create innovative learning experiences for their students.
- In addition to providing product training, the program also helps educators make the most of iPad, Mac, and built-in apps in teaching and learning.
- The program delivers monthly newsletters with fresh ideas featuring real teachers, lesson ideas, educational apps, and tips that teachers can use in the classroom.
- The program is a great way for school leaders to offer professional learning that's fun and makes the most of the technology investment they've made.
- The program will continue to grow regularly over time, making new learning resources available to teachers.

The [Apple Teacher web page](#) allows teachers to explore and learn more about:

- Real stories
- Tips, inspiration, and news
- Workshop opportunities at Apple Retail
- Educational resources and learning materials

Apple has curated an [Apple Teacher collection](#) for educators in their iBooks Store. This collection is designed to help teachers find new ways to engage students by unlocking the magic of iPad, Mac and built-in apps. The Apple teacher collection provides teachers with the following resources:

- iPad starter guides.
- Mac starter guides.
- iPad and Mac learning workflows - fostering creativity and enhancing productivity

Apple is happy to meet with individual faculty or in small groups to learn more on these subjects and other Apple technology.
The Chronicle for Higher Education offers a Collection of articles focused on the move to online teaching during a crisis called Moving Online Now.