



Guidelines for Effective Online Teaching – The Ten Essentials

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1. Orient Your Students to the Online Environment

Your students may not know how to be an effective online learner in your course. They also won't know how *you* expect them to navigate and interact. Providing clear instructions for where to find things, how to get help and for what, and how to navigate your course are critical parts of orienting students and ensuring a successful learning experience online. A visual road map, a 3-5 minutes screen cast recording showing the students around, and short precise weekly instructions should all be part of your course. Likewise, first week activities should be designed to help students practice how to navigate and to help them get to know your online space, for example with an online scavenger hunt.

2. Create a Safe and Welcoming Space

Imagine a classroom that feels warm and welcoming for every student to enter. A space that is safe for each individual to be themselves, share and take risks. A space that is more than the platform it's hosted on, and which evolves into a learning community as the term progresses. You are the host of this space. It is your responsibility to set the tone, to make sure students know what the "house rules" are, and to create intentional opportunities for peer-to-peer connection, social learning and co-creation of knowledge. Expectations for behaviour and respectful communication need to be more explicit online and can be part of an initial course activity. A personal welcome video, online get-to-know-you ice-breakers and options for individual, small and large group activities are good examples of building a safe learning community.



3. Host Virtual Office Hours

Office hours are opportunities for you and your students to connect in real-time, often informally, outside of official teaching, and beyond responding to emails. Office hours are the experience of a live person behind the more impersonal online interface. Examples of how to host online office hours are dedicating weekly times for students to drop into a live online meeting room or instant chat (i.e. WebEx, MS Teams), as well as offering times in your schedule where students may “book you” for one-on-ones or meetings with their team. You can also ask students to meet with you as part of completing an assignment, or dedicate a live session to specific questions or a review. While the format may vary depending on your context, you must make yourself available on a weekly basis for this type of connection.

4. Be Present

Being present in your online course means a lot more than grading assignments and answering emails. Students must get the sense that you are “holding the space”, listening and guiding their learning. Online presence means interacting at key times in a learning activity, synthesizing class discussions, guiding, asking questions to deepen or further learning, and generally sensing and responding to where students are at throughout the weeks of the term. This can look like anything from a personable welcome video, to weekly summaries, links and connections to a relevant news item or a personal story, to a strategically placed resource or question in a forum discussion. Students will feel safe and confident to join in, take risks and explore the topics when they know they can rely on you to be there.

5. Create a Module Structure

Chunk your course into key themes, topics or ideas, and create modules for each main theme with clearly defined learning outcomes, activities and opportunities for formative assessment. Themes and assignments can scaffold and interleave week to week, but to stay motivated, your online students will need clear guidelines for what they are expected to learn and be able to do during each week or module. For example, start each week/module by explicitly stating the learning outcomes and let those guide your decisions for content, active learning activities and assessment that week. Online learning requires a different kind of motivation and self-determination from your students. You need to be deliberate about encouraging students to be self-directed learners, to reflect on how they will overcome challenges in your course, set goals and stay motivated.

6. Create a Weekly Flow

Use a course roadmap to plot a weekly flow with a clear due dates (soft and hard deadlines) and expectations for pacing work, weekly interaction, activity and time typically required to complete each component. A weekly flow could look like: Topic introduction Monday, chapter quiz due Tuesday, engagement in learning activities Wednesday to Friday, formative assessment, reflection or assignment due Sunday. While many online students appreciate and require the flexibility offered by online courses, several also need a predictable *structure* to rely on, to help them plan their time and to keep them motivated and engaged, especially when faced with multiple demands on their time. When designing your weekly flow, remember that activities online may require more or less time to complete than if not online, and that in the end, an online 3-credit course should require the same amount of student work as any 3-credit course.



7. Use Technology to Advance Learning

Always ask yourself how technology will support or advance student learning. Every decision you make when designing your online course should be based on your course learning outcomes. This goes for technology too. Online courses can easily become text heavy and dry, and *intentional* use of collaborative technologies, interactive applications (and co-creation) of content such as short videos (max 6 minutes), or concept maps can enhance engagement and the overall student learning experience when used with purpose. Also keep in mind that sometimes the simplest tool may be the most effective. Check FOIPPA compliance and accessibility for students from different devices and make sure you are comfortable with the apps or technologies you are using. Then provide clear written or video instructions for use and help.

8. Reach Out to Students Proactively

Make it a habit to ask yourself how each of your students is doing in your course and be proactive about reaching out to students individually if they joined the course late, if they didn't register their eText, if you haven't seen them online for a week, or if they appear to struggle otherwise with an aspect of your course. A personal email reminds students that you care, gives them an opening for asking for help and is often all it takes to motivate someone who feels a bit lost. Online courses offer many options for you to get to know your students and to check in on their performance outside of the formal learning activities. Examples are an early online survey asking each student to give you information about their hopes, fears and expected challenges in the course; a weekly one-click poll where you "take the temperature" of the class; LMS (eLearn) activity logs for individual students, and formative assessments during the semester focused on what's working and what's not, including adjustments you will make.

9. Design Varied Learning Experiences

Vary content, assignments, synchronous and asynchronous activities and give students choices for how to solve a problem, meet a weekly learning goals or complete an assignment. A variety of learning experiences, such as peer-to-peer discussions, cases, role-plays, and games enhance student motivation and allow learners to connect their learning and cement new knowledge in more than one way. Make use of the online environment to offer combinations of text, visuals and short video clips, whether created by you or your students.

10. Provide Clear and Frequent Opportunities for Assessment

In addition to summative assessments (midterms, final exams), it is also important to give opportunities for formative assessments in your online course. Formative assessments are typically not graded, may be part of learning activities, or student progress may be more explicitly assessed through reflections or low-stakes quizzes that let both the student and you know how well they are doing. Providing rubrics and examples of what a quality project, online discussion contribution, etc., would look like, is a good way to make expectations visible and may be even more needed for online students.