

FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE DESIGN, INSTRUCTION, AND EVALUATION

1. Be Organized

Prepare LMS, materials, and communication in advance and ensure everything is easy to access and understand.

- Create an orientation to the course and to the LMS
- Every item in a single place, every item clearly labeled
- Break course into weeks, modules, etc. Summarize the expectations/work for each module
- Provide clear and complete directions and easy access to all resources needed
- Due dates, links, assignment details must be current and consistent (limit use of “one time only” information)
- Hide tools and course areas you don’t use
- Share how/where assignments should be submitted and where grades/feedback can be found
- Create off topic discussion area to keep discussion topics focused
- Develop most of a class before it begins, and then change very little. Have one area to note any changes (i.e. announcements)
- Have someone review your course before it opens

2. Motivate Learners

Plan activities and facilitation techniques to engage learners with whom you do not interact face to face.

- Ensure LMS and all materials are accessible and apply universal design learning principles
 - Don’t fill time, rather, only include work and activities that meet learning outcomes
 - Have students create study plans or learning contracts
 - Give a checklist of tasks to complete in a unit/week
 - Give “pep talks” during the point in the term when motivation generally lags
 - Respond to student communication in a timely manner
 - Set clear expectations for participation and check in with students on how they are doing
 - Vary the types of activities and discussions, but keep the same organizational framework
 - Encourage reflective writing and activities
 - Share suggestions for how to be successful in the online learning environment (i.e. connect with fellow learners outside of class, set specific times to work on class, create a study space)
 - Give a reason or incentive to participate and accountability measures for not participating
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3. Build an Online Community

Creating community between learners and the instructor can be a key to ongoing engagement and learning transfer in a distance environment.

- Build Learner-to-Learner Community:
 - Develop relationships (introductions, autobiographies, stories)
 - Learners participate in decision making on communication rules and class protocols
 - All learners participate in discussions and class activities
 - Create non-subject matter discussion areas, some just for learners, some created by learners
 - Collaboration, not just interaction
 - Knowledge construction, not just information sharing
 - Interdependence during discussions (relying on peers, not just instructor)
 - Small team collaboration monitored by an instructor
 - Peer feedback on assignments
 - Ask for and use preferred learner names and pronouns
- Build Learner-to-Teacher Community:
 - Address students by name in interactions and in formal feedback
 - Create a teaching presence
 - Active discussion participation
 - Establish a personal presence (photos, stories, personal examples related to content)
 - Clear expectations, procedures and community rules
 - Establish the building blocks of community early in the class, before more demanding intellectual tasks get under way
 - The emphasis on shared goals needs to be explicit, helping students to overcome a sense of being strangers with nothing in common
 - Encourage participation
 - Give ample and frequent feedback and reward
 - Communicate a set expectation to answer email (and other communication) promptly
 - Attend to individual concerns
 - Use a friendly, personal tone
 - Model community participation skills and values
 - Actively monitor discussions to answer questions that students cannot address, resolve conflicts, and guide discussion as needed

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4. Be a Real Person

Bridge the gap caused by physical distance in online settings.

- Create and post current videos (10 minutes or less is a good length)
- Share personal examples related to the content
- Individually reply to student reflections
- Be timely in email responses
- Share how you prefer to be addressed
- Encourage individual phone calls, Skype meetings, etc.
- Set up real-time chats (i.e. Zoom)

5. Effectively Facilitate Discussions

Discussions are popular in online learning but facilitation must be approached differently than in face to face settings.

- Ask thought-provoking questions rather than questions just requiring content knowledge
 - Center on a question with no "correct" answer so students need to give an opinion and a rationale
 - Limit teacher "answers". Be present, but allow learners to struggle, make mistakes, and figure things out.
 - Do not respond to every student post
 - Create a non-threatening atmosphere where ideas and opinions can be explored and formed
 - Research information and then return to the discussion (If a student puts time into learning something, they want to share this new knowledge)
 - Have students share additional sources so others can read a new viewpoint or discover an expert on a topic
 - Encourage responses to answer a question AND pose a further question
 - Include compliments and acknowledgement in posts
 - Encourage participation throughout a week/module, not just one time
 - Share that posts can achieve many things (directly answer a question, pose a new question, ask for clarification, provide a resource, provide an example, summarize what has been said)
 - Try to model a face-to-face conversation as much as possible
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6. Go Beyond Discussions

Discussion are popular but there are many other ways meet learning outcomes.

- Have students find and share resources
- Participate in an activity in the community and share experiences
- Allow “visual” discussions
- Reflective journaling
- Verbal discussions (i.e. videos, audio file)
- Games and Gaming
- Field trips (real or virtual)
- Problem based learning
- Music

7. Manage Your Time

Facilitating online does not have to be overly time consuming if you are prepared.

- Introductory video/post of the topic and major information
 - Wrap up video/post to address lingering questions
 - Don’t respond to everyone/every post
 - Respond to posts at a set time(s) each week/unit
 - Address common questions in a FAQ or announcement
 - Take time off and let students know when this is
 - Change very little once a course begins
 - Provide technical support resources and contact information
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