

*Online Course Design & Professional Development for New Online Instructors*

# Designing an Online Course and Becoming an Online Educator

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



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This manual provides a step-by-step process and instructional design guidelines for the design of an effective online teaching and learning environment.

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## How to use this Manual

This Manual may be used as a step-by-step guide to online course development, or as a reference manual. It may also be used in conjunction with an online course or workshop, or as a resource in online faculty development activities. While written primarily for those who have never created or taught an online course, the manual contains information to help experienced faculty improve their courses. The manual offers a practical “hands on” process that will help you design and teach an effective online course, including the tips, suggestions, and resources needed to develop and manage online instruction. You will note, however, that the last step in the process is “Evolve.” Iteration, continuous improvement, and ongoing learning are built into this process. So, though you can use this Manual to build and prepare to teach an online course, it is in the *process* rather than the destination where there is the most value.

By emphasizing foundational theory and best practices, the manual presents specific course-building activities designed to assist instructors with course development, organization, and evaluation. The steps utilized are:

- 1: Reflect
- 2: Connect
- 3: Organize
- 4: Build
- 5: Refine
- 6: Implement
- 7: Evolve

### Organization of Steps

#### Overview, Purpose and Objectives

##### Background

Information to clarify and support learner capacity to meet objectives.

##### Best Practices

Best practice exercises to enhance understanding, adaptation, and implementation of step objectives.

##### Activities

Course development activities.

##### Review

A quick recap to reinforce learning and retention of new material.

##### Resources

Helpful readings, links, presentations and more to support learning and uptake.

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# Online Course Development: At-a-glance

Use these steps to guide your online course development.

| PROCESS  | ACTIVITIES  |
|--|---|
| <b>Step 1: Reflect</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore</li><li>• Consider Possibilities</li><li>• Question Assumptions</li><li>• Identify Concerns</li><li>• Get Answers</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Self-assess your readiness to develop an online course.</li><li>-Create a course description.</li><li>-Draft your course information details.</li></ul>                          |
| <b>Step 2: Connect</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observe Exemplary Online Courses</li><li>• Draw Connections</li><li>• Consider Differences</li><li>• Re-conceptualize Learning Activities for the online environment.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Create a Course Information area in your course in your <b>course development tool</b>*</li></ul> <p><i>*Course development tool: e.g., Moodle, BlackBoard, Canvas, etc.</i></p> |
| <b>Step 3: Organize</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chunk and sequence content</li><li>• Draft structure</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Establish modules in your <b>course development tool</b></li></ul>   |
| <b>Step 4: Build</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider the options and limitations of the online teaching and learning environment</li><li>• Transition from theory to effective design and practice</li></ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Climb the learning curve in your <b>course development tool</b></li><li>-Design learning activities for each module</li></ul>  |
| <b>Step 5: Refine</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review, revise, refine the course</li><li>• Evaluate effectiveness</li><li>• Take the student perspective</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Review and walk through your course and make revisions</li></ul>   |
| <b>Step 6: Implement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare to pilot your course</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Learn and practice course management skills</li></ul>  |
| <b>Step 7: Evolve</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commit to iteration</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Review, evaluate, and revise your course</li></ul>   |

# Welcome!

Introduction to the Designing an Online Course and Becoming an Online Educator Manual

The purpose of this of this manual is to:

- Guide you through a Seven-Step Process to develop your own effective online teaching and learning environment.

*I hope you enjoy developing your online course. **Good luck!***

## Step 1: Reflect

### Overview, Purpose, and Objectives

---

#### Overview

This step is designed to help you visualize teaching in an asynchronous online learning environment.

#### Purpose

The purposes of this step are to:

- Provide information related to effective online teaching and learning practices.
- Create opportunity for reflection on what your course might look like in an online asynchronous environment.
- Explore concerns and questions about online teaching, learning or course design.
- Begin to refine your online course concept from the abstract to the concrete.
- Emphasize the importance of, and provide the opportunity to practice writing course materials to an individual online student.
- Assess your computer skills.
- Become familiar with the **course development tool**.

#### Objectives

Tasks for this step include:

- Assessing your computer skills.
- Read articles about effective practices in online teaching and learning.
- Participate in an online discussion with other course developers.
- Create a draft course concept by writing a course description and filling out a course information questionnaire.
- Document course information.

## Background

---

In order to envision a course concept, it is helpful to:

- Become familiar with the principles of learning and teaching in an online environment. *Read and view the assigned Resources for Step 1.*
- Assess your skills.
- Assess your current instructional practices as they relate to distance learning principles by reflecting on classroom. How might online teaching differ from the traditional classroom setting? ***Question your assumptions!***
- Identify learning activities and evaluation methods appropriate to asynchronous learning and consider how they might be utilized.
- Recognize and discuss concerns about the prospect of developing and teaching a course online.
- Create a draft course concept by writing a course description and filling out a course information questionnaire.

## Readings, Videos, and Resources

---

Read the assigned articles and review the following web resources:

### Readings:

- *Step 1* in the course manual.
- [\*Ten Ways Online Education Matches, or Surpasses, Face-to-Face Learning\*](#), Kassop, Mark - The Technology Source Archives, at the University of North Carolina, May/June 2003.
- [\*Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0\*](#), John Seeley Brown & Richard P. Adler (2008), Educause Review, vol. 43, issue 1. Or <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0811.pdf>
- [Online Student Demographics](#) & [Info Graphic](#).

### Videos:

- [Did you know?](#) (YouTube video)
- [Online Teaching & Learning](#) (Minilog play list)
- [Effective Course Design and Alignment](#) (YouTube video)
- [Discussion Board Etiquette](#) (YouTube video)

### Resources:

- [Let's Break the Ice!](#) VoiceThread activity. [Instructions for how to comment](#) on a VoiceThread
- [How NOT to Write Objectives](#)
- [An interactive model of learning objectives based on a revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy](#)
- [Verbs to Use in Writing Objectives](#)
- [Plagiarism](#) (YouTube playlist)
- [Netiquette](#) (YouTube video)

## Assess Your Skills

To develop and teach an online course, basic computer, word processing, internet, and email skills are essential. Use the checklists below to evaluate your readiness for online teaching.

---

### The Basics: Self-Assessment Checklist

---

Check the boxes for which you can offer a positive response.

- ☐ My institution supports online learning.
- ☐ I have a passion for teaching, learning, and my students.
- ☐ I am willing to “rethink” how I teach.
- ☐ I am committed to complete the design and development of my online course prior to teaching it.
- ☐ I am committed to making use of institutional support and faculty development opportunities.
- ☐ I have consistent and stable access to the internet.
- ☐ I can commit to improve the design of my online course and my online teaching practices.

---

### Computer Skills Self-Assessment Checklist

---

I can:

- ☐ Turn on, restart, and shut down a computer, its monitor, and its printer.
- ☐ Launch applications (programs), quit, and switch between programs.
- ☐ Use a standard keyboard to type, erase text, and move the cursor.
- ☐ Use a spell checker.
- ☐ Use a mouse to open, close, minimize, and move/resize windows and menus on the desktop to activate commands, reveal menus, and move (drag) screen elements.
- ☐ Use a scroll bar.
- ☐ Create, rename, and delete folders and directories to organize files.
- ☐ Find, open, copy, move, rename, and delete files.
- ☐ Find files by switching views and conducting key word searches.
- ☐ Select multiple files or folders.
- ☐ Understand how to insert and remove a CD disk, pen/flash/thumb drive, or external drive.
- ☐ Save and retrieve files from storage devices such as a hard drive, CD disk, thumb (pen), or external drive
- ☐ Print files.
- ☐ Create/print pdf files.
- ☐ Create PowerPoint presentations (or equivalent).

- ☐ Create a spreadsheet.
- ☐ Zip (compress) a folder/file.
- ☐ Access or change network settings to connect to the internet via wi-fi, Ethernet, or other network connection.

---

## Word Processing Skills Self-Assessment Checklist

---

I can:

- ☐ Create, save, delete, and print a new document using a word processor such as Microsoft Word.
- ☐ Locate an existing word processed file, and edit and save changes to that file.
- ☐ Cut, copy, and paste text within and between documents, or to another location.
- ☐ Understand and use auto word wrap.
- ☐ Save a word-processed document in .RTF or HTML format.
- ☐ Format and change text formatting such as font style and size, and paragraph alignment.

---

## Internet Skills Self-Assessment Checklist

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I can:

- ☐ Access the World Wide Web using a browser such as Firefox, Safari, or Chrome.
- ☐ Download and install browser plug-ins for common software applications such as Adobe Acrobat Reader, Windows Media Player, and Real Player.
- ☐ Manage routine browser issues and settings (clear browser history and cache, manage pop-ups, and manage mixed content, including secure and non-secure items, and accept embedded multimedia content).
- ☐ View a specific site by entering a URL (Internet address) i.e., <http://suny.edu>
- ☐ Use the “Bookmark” or “Favorites” feature of your browser to create, access, maintain, and manage a list of web pages.
- ☐ Use an Internet search engine such as <http://google.com> to find specific information on the web
- ☐ Copy bookmark/favorite/URL/hyperlink to a word processor.
- ☐ Open, save, and upload Adobe Acrobat files (PDF files), word processed files, and images in various formats.

---

## Email Skills Self-Assessment Checklist

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I can:

- ☐ Use an email program such as Outlook to send, receive, reply to, forward, and search email messages
- ☐ Attach a file to an email message, and open and save an incoming email attachment.
- ☐ Print/ save/store/organize information in folders, and delete, and retrieve email messages.
- ☐ Use the “address book” email feature to store contact information, and create and maintain “groups” to facilitate sending a message to a group of people.

If you need to improve your skills in any of the listed “unchecked areas” of any of these self-assessments, work with the faculty help sources on your campus. Most institutions have instructional technology departments and programs to assist faculty in these and other areas.

## Draft your Course Concept

---

The Course Description and Course Information forms that follow should assist with course concept clarification and design.

Before completing the forms, it would be helpful to view the [Effective Course Design and Alignment video](#). Well-written, measurable learning objectives are essential to a high quality, effective online learning experience. Mechanisms for assessment/feedback for each activity in the course, tied to specific learning objectives, are also critical.

- Review **How NOT to Write Objectives**:  
<http://www.phy.ilstu.edu/pte/310content/objectives/stperfobjectives.html>
- Consider course objectives relative to **Bloom's Taxonomy**  
<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/RevisedBlooms1.html>
- Consider **verb usage to ensure appropriate level**  
<https://anethicalisland.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/bloom-verbs.jpg>

Instructors will draft text for online course orientation documents, including online course objectives.

Specifically, you will draft orientation documents, create a deconstructed syllabus, and present them in a course information area in your course. Since written communication is obviously essential in online education, it is important to communicate in ways that create “bridges” to foster connection and community.

Communication for online courses is most effective when written to address a single student, since students will participate in your course as individuals and not in the context of the traditional group dynamic. For this reason, the activity also provides an opportunity to write documents using first and second person.

## Course Description Activity

Assume that a student has asked you the following questions and respond in a narrative, conversational tone. The answers will be utilized later in course information documents.

To make your ideas "user friendly," write your descriptions as though you are addressing a single student. Remember, your students will participate in your course as an individual, not in a class context.

You will use the what you draft this exercise in Step 2 as the basis for the course information documents you will create for your online course, and as a starting point for online course development.

---

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

---

*“What will I get out of taking this course?”*

---

*“What is this course about?”*

---

*“How is this course organized?”*

---

*“What exactly will I be doing when I take this course?”*

---

*“How will you evaluate me and assess my work? What constitutes ‘good’ work in the course?”*

---

## Course Information Activity

Course Information provides students with the specific details and instructions needed to enroll in the course. Additionally, it informs the institution to understand the scope and features of the course.

---

### ABOUT YOUR COURSE

---

Course Title:

Institution & Department:

Course Code:

Number of Credits:

Course duration: (in weeks)

---

Course prerequisites:

---

If this course is part of a degree program, please identify:

---

What students might be interested in this course?

---

Have you taught this course before? How often and in what formats? (classroom, hybrid, online)

---

Do you know your campus policies for online courses regarding web accessibility, copyright and fair use, attendance, course caps, extensions, etc.,

---

Course features?

---

What texts or additional materials/resources will be used (e.g., publisher's web sites, course-packs, online reserve material from your campus library, etc.)?

---

What technology will students need in order to take the course?

---

What other media (video, sound, simulations, chat, etc.) will students use in your online course?

---

What kinds of assignments will be required and what evaluation process will be utilized in the course?

---

---

## ABOUT YOUR COURSE

---

---

Who, specifically, will assist in course development?

---

Will guest experts/lecturers, additional instructors, auditors, grad assistants, or others participate?

---

What must students do to complete the course successfully?

---

What expectations do you have of your students? (Behavior, participation, quality of work, plagiarism, etc.)

---

How will a sense of class community be created and sustained?

---

What mechanisms will be in place to encourage student feedback?

---

How will your expectations regarding student contact or course logon schedule be communicated to students?

---

What do you feel you need to be successful in developing and teaching your online course?

---



## Online Activities

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### Online Course Activities

- Participate as a student in the asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own course.
- Discuss concerns about teaching an online course.
- Reflect on your professional practice as an educator.
- Consider who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, teaching and learning online in general, and on the online course design/development process.
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Become familiar with the **course development tool**
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

---

In the first step, you:

- Developed a basic understanding of effective online teaching and learning practices.
- Assessed computer skills.
- Converted course concept from abstract to concrete by constructing a course description and detailing your course information.
- Considered the course from students' perspective by expressing information with the student in mind
- Observed discussion in an online course.
- Experienced the perspective of a student with your participation in that online course.
- Discussed concerns about the online teaching and learning environment.
- Reflected on who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be perceived as an online educator.
- Considered who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, teaching and learning online in general and the online course development process.
- Began to consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

*You are now ready to move on to the next Step: 2. Connect!*

## Step 2: Connect

### Overview, Purpose, Objectives

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#### Overview

In this step you will:

- Create/draft the course information area and documents for your online course in your **course development tool**.
- Observe exemplar online courses as models to help inform your own online course design.

#### Purpose

The purposes of this step are to:

- Examine examples of successful and effective online courses and activities.
- Draw connections between what you will do online and what you do in the classroom - consider differences and re-conceptualize.
- Draft course content for your online course that provides your students with detailed course information.

#### Objectives:

You will draft, create, and/or identify:

- A *welcome* to the course.
- An overview of the course.
- What is going to happen in the course.
- Contact information.
- Syllabus and schedule information.
- What kinds of activities your students will encounter.
- Instructor expectations and evaluation criteria.
- What students can expect from you and the course.
- Identifiable steps to enroll in and take the course.
- A Course Information area in your **course development tool**.
- Implement basic web page presentation techniques.

## Background

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### The Purpose of Creating an Orientation for your Course

The aim of your course and an orientation to its structure should be carefully spelled out from the beginning. Students should know what is going to happen in the course, how they are going to be assessed, and what they should strive to achieve. In addition to a course overview, students also should be given an orientation to the mechanics of the course, and be presented with activities to help “break the ice” in order to build a sense of class community.

The course syllabus should provide this information. Deconstructing the syllabus and adapting it into a well-organized series of specific course information documents will assist students in their understanding of the course. Creating an orientation to your course in a “course information” area provides quick and easy access to specific course information written with the online student in mind. The course information area helps to create an immediate connection between instructor and students, among students, and between students and the course content and environment. These connections are essential to a successful and effective online learning environment.

Using the features available in your **course development tool**, you will create a number of "standard" course information documents to give students information about the course. Think of these documents as containing all the information needed by students to fully and clearly understand how the course works and what to expect.

The recommended standard Course Information/Orientation documents are:

1. WELCOME!
2. Contact Information
3. Course Overview & Objectives
4. Readings and Materials
5. Course Learning Activities
6. How You Will Be Evaluated
7. My Expectations
8. Course Schedule
9. YOUR NEXT STEPS

Specifically, the purposes of your Course Information documents are to:

- Introduce yourself and your course.
- Present the course overview, syllabus, schedule, and resources.
- Explain the types of learning activities your students will be expected to complete in the course.
- Present your expectations of students and describe how student work will be evaluated.
- Give students several "ice-breaking" tasks to get them started, and to provide opportunities to meet each other and stimulate engagement in the virtual learning environment.
- Instruct students precisely about course procedure: what they are to do first and next in your course.

Reading through the Course Information documents and performing the first tasks detailed in the NEXT STEPS document will introduce and encourage a sense of class community and reinforce the basic mechanical skills that your students will need to participate in your course.

## Resources and Resources

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### Readings:

- *Step 2* in the course manual.
- [\*A series of unfortunate online events and how to avoid them\*](#), Alejandra M. Pickett (2006).
- [\*Do online students dream of electric teachers?\*](#) Jason Scorza (2005). Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, Vol. 9, issue 2.

### Videos:

- [How to Design your Online Course](#), Michelle Pacansky-Brock (YouTube, 2014).
- [Designing an Online Learning Environment](#) - Minilog playlist.

### Presentations:

- [What Works?: LD Basics for the Online Classroom](#) presented by Alexandra M. Pickett (Duration: 00:59:24)

### Podcasts:

- [Exemplar Online Instructor Interviews: Introduction & Tour](#)

### Best Practices Checklists and Course Quality Rubrics

- Best Practices Checklists
- Course Review Checklist
- Course Review Rubric

### Additional Resources:

- [UDL at a Glance](#), Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST).

## Create Your Course Information Documents

A student that is well oriented to the course and instructor expectations, will have fewer questions and feel comfortable in your online classroom.

| Orientation Documents:          | Purpose:   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| WELCOME!                        | Introduces the instructor and course to students. Think of it as a letter of introduction that offers the student a first glimpse of the course and of you!  |
| Contact Information             | Details specific information about contacting the instructor.  |
| Course Overview and Objectives  | Describes the course and course learning objectives in greater detail.   |
| Readings and Materials          | Details the texts and/or materials to be used in the course. Optional/additional reading materials or resources for course may be identified as well.  |
| Course Learning Activities      | Describes specifically each type of activity that students will encounter.   |
| How Your Work Will Be Evaluated | Details specifically how each activity will be evaluated.  |
| My Expectations                 | Details instructor expectations specifically in terms of class participation and/or any other specific expectations you may have for students in your class. Student expectations of you might also be discussed.  |
| Course Schedule                 | Clearly outlines every activity the student needs to complete in your course including reading assignments, assignment due dates, scheduled tests and quizzes, special projects, discussions, group activities. Titles and references to documents and module in your course must be referenced consistently for the schedule to be effective. |
| YOUR NEXT STEPS                 | Identifies additional tasks, such as reading announcements, posting a personal profile, or participating in an ice-breaking discussion.  |

Use the answers to the questions you drafted in the first two written activities in Step 1 as a guide for the content will present it in these course information documents.



## Best Practices

### General suggestions for presenting content online

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#### Making your web course materials clearer and more effective:

- Create navigational instructions and cues that explicitly tell students where to go next and what to do. Don't assume students know where to go or what is expected of them.
- Break long documents into several shorter documents. A good rule of thumb is to not exceed a couple of screens for scrolling. If you must have a long document, inform students at the top of the page. (“You may want to print this out for easier reading.”)
- Use heads, subheads, hypertext, and a document hierarchy to break up long paragraphs without disruption to flow or meaning.
- Place important information at the beginning of a document.
- Use short descriptive titles for your document subjects and for structuring the content of your course. Long, vague titles don't fit well on the screen and generally fail to convey information well, compromising effectiveness and purpose. Indicate the type of assignment, due dates, or time frames in the subject lines or module names and use them consistently throughout your course.
- Use directives, first person, and a friendly, conversational tone. Avoid using the third person voice in your writing.
- Don't overuse hypertext to link your course pages or to link to other web sites.
- Spellcheck your work.

## General “Do’s” for Successful Web Page Presentation

Before beginning to create the first document in the **course development tool**, be aware that certain things might not transfer to the web environment. In addition, there are also certain web design conventions that make your documents more effective, legible, and attractive. Please review the following recommendations:

| DO   | AVOID   |
|--|---|
| Use a web editor to create numbered or bulleted lists and html tables for getting things to line up.                               | Don't use the space bar or the tab key to get things to line up. <i>The web does not recognize word processed tabs and spaces.</i>  |
| Use the word-wrap feature that automatically brings up the next line.  | Don't use the <Return>, or <Enter> key to move from one line of text to another in running text. <i>This will result in jagged line breaks.</i>   |
| Put blank lines between paragraphs to achieve white space and a clean, legible look to your page.                                  | Don't indent running text. <i>Word processed indents don't transfer to the web and on the web, type is much more legible if type is aligned flush left and separate paragraphs with blank lines.</i>  |
| Use bold, italic, underline, and all caps judiciously for emphasis, voice, or to distinguish heads and subheads from running text. | Don't over emphasize. Don't overuse bold, italic, or bold italic. <i>It is hard to read and will lose its desired effect.</i><br><br>Don't use <u>underline</u> . <i>On the web underlined type indicates a clickable hotlink.</i><br><br>Don't use ALL CAPS. <i>All caps are very hard to read in running text and are the convention on the Internet for SHOUTING.</i>  |
| Use color judiciously and consistently for emphasis, or to indicate a specific function.   | Don't use color type in running text. <i>Arbitrary and inconsistent use of color is confusing and hard to read.</i><br><br>Don't use the colors blue or purple. <i>On the web, blue and purple for single words will look like clickable hypertext links.</i>   |
| Use a standard font.   | Don't bother with different fonts; they won't translate to the web. Use standards: Times or Times New Roman for serif text, or the Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Sans serif for sans-serif type. <i>On the web all text, no matter what, will appear in the default font of the browser.</i>   |
| Use font size 12 for text and 14 consistently for readability and headlines.   | Don't use more than 3 font sizes and don't mix fonts and sizes in text. Be aware that font sizes are rendered differently on Mac and PC browsers (PCs render text larger than Macs). <i>Mixing font sizes inconsistently will look chaotic and be confusing. Check to see how it will look to students and understand that students can change their browsers in various ways to customize the display of their pages</i> |

Focus initially on course content and structure. A good rule of thumb is: “*First make it work, then make it pretty.*”

## Online Activities

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### Online Course Activities

Continue to:

- Participate as a student in the online asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Review the exemplary online courses for observation. Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own online course.
- Reflect on and discuss any concerns you may have about the prospect of teaching and learning online in the online course.
- Reflect on your who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be as an online educator.
- Consider who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, teaching and learning online in general, and on the online course design/development process.
- Observe some exemplar online courses.
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Create the recommended Course Information area and draft documents in your **course development tool**.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

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In the second step you:

- Reviewed best practices and used/adapted them to create the Course Information documents for your online course in the appropriate area using your **course development tool**.
- Had the opportunity to observe some exemplar online courses.
- Drew connections, considered differences, and began to re-conceptualize activities for your online course.
- Continued your participation in the online course discussions and activities.

*You are now ready to move on to the next **Step: 3. Organize!***

## Step 3: Organize

### Overview, Purpose, Objectives

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#### Overview

The design and organization of your course will take time to conceptualize and build, and you need to understand, consider, and determine what defines effective online teaching so that you can design your course well. You also need to learn how to use your course development tool.

#### Purpose

The purposes of this step are to:

- Look at examples of successful and effective online courses and activities.
- Begin to conceptualize, chunk, and sequence your course modules.
- Create a module outline structure for your course content in your **course development tool**.

#### Objectives

In this step you will:

- Observe exemplar online courses as models to help inform your own online course design.
- Draft a list of your course modules.
- Organize your course module list and name each module.
- Create the overview document for each of your modules in your **course development tool**.
- Learn to create, order, reorder, rename, and move your course modules, sections, and documents in your **course development tool**.

## Background

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The development of your online course requires instructional design and organization.

The instructional design and organization of your course will take time to conceptualize and build, and you need to understand, consider, and explore for yourself what effectiveness in an online teaching and learning environment so that you can design your course well. You also need to learn how to use your **course development tool**.

To convert or create your course for an online asynchronous environment, instructional design involves the following interrelated steps:

1. **Create a Course Overview (which you did under Step 2. Connect)**

Creating the Course Information area in your course results in a Course Overview that involves the abstract "what" of the course: What am I going to teach in terms of content? What questions or problems will be central to the course? What concepts will be fundamental or prerequisite? What information will I provide, or will students need to access and how? What will students need to do or produce, as well as when and how? What is my concept of the course? What overall plan/schedule shall I adopt? What requirements shall I set up? What expectations do I have of the students, their work and their participation in the course? What methods of evaluation will I use?

2. **Synthesize Chunks**

"Chunks" imply form and structure, and involve "when" moving the abstract to the tangible structure of the course. "Chunks" are the major units of a course and can follow the chapters of a textbook, break content into topical areas, organize materials chronologically or by task. Regardless of the type of chunking scheme you adopt, the chunks of your course must logically and consistently organize and present the materials and activities of your course.

3. **Develop the Outline**

Chunks are then further developed into the outline of the course and actual learning activities as presented to students. What do the students do first? What do they need to know before they can go on? What theory or fundamental information is necessary for them to learn prior to applying the knowledge?

4. **Devise Learning Activities**

"Learning Activities" involve the "how": How will students meet course objectives? What do students need to know or learn? How will students be actively involved? How will students develop insights, understandings, knowledge, and abilities that are essential? How will students learn to apply their critical thinking to real world problem-solving?

## Readings and Resources

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### Readings:

- *Step 3* in the course manual.
- [\*\(My\) Three Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy\*](#), William E. Pelz, JALN, Volume 8, Issue 3 - June 2004.
- [\*The Role of Questions in Teaching, Thinking and Learning\*](#), Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2007.

### Videos:

- [How to Design your Online Course](#), Michelle Pacansky-Brock (YouTube, 2014)
- [Creating/Presenting Online Content](#) - Minilog playlist.

### Presentations:

- [Keys to Success: Are You Ready to Develop an Online Course? presented by Alexandra Pickett \(Duration: 00:35:00\)](#)

### Podcasts:

- [Exemplar Online Instructor Interviews: Learning Activities](#)

### Best Practices Checklists and Course Quality Rubrics:

- Best Practices Checklists
- Course Review Checklist
- Course Review Rubric

### Additional Resources:

- [\*The university student experience of face-to-face and online discussions: coherence, reflection and meaning. Research in Learning Technology\*](#), 15(1), Ellis, R. A., Goodyear, P., O'Hara, A., & Prosser, M. (2007).
- [\*A Preliminary Investigation of 'Teaching Presence' in the SUNY Learning Network\*](#), Shea, P., Fredericksen, E., Pickett, A., Pelz, W., (2003) Elements of Quality Online Education, Needham, MA.

## Synthesize “Chunks” and Develop your Course Outline

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### Identify your Course Modules

#### What is a course module?

A module is a "chunk" of your course. Whether you are teaching mathematics, Shakespeare, anthropology, or accounting, you must "chunk" the content of your course in to digestible pieces or modules to give it structure, consistency, and form for online presentation and delivery to your students.

Your pedagogical approach, the nature of your content, and the constraints and features of the online asynchronous environment are what will determine how you "chunk" your course.

1. Consider your goals and content and see whether chunks naturally emerge.
2. Look at examples of how others have "chunked" their courses. Depending on what is being taught and how the instructor teaches, a module can be created by:
  - Content-specific topics
  - Chapters of a textbook you are using
  - Date or time frame
  - Metaphor
  - Steps in a process

Any of these methods may be combined.

### Make a List of your Modules

This will be a paper and pencil activity. Based on your Course Description assignment, and after reviewing the examples, and thinking about your course content in terms of modules, you will create a DRAFT list of the modules for your course.

#### How do I go about chunking my course into modules?

1. List your modules.  
Give a DRAFT name or title for each module. (This list will eventually become the outline you use to create your course in your course development tool.)
2. Sequence your modules.  
Do you foresee students working through these modules in a specific order? If so, DRAFT a list of the modules in that order. If not, list the modules in a logical order.

### Name your modules

Create a DRAFT name for each module that is engaging, meaningful, descriptive, and unambiguous. Keep titles short and to the point but be sure the names convey information that organizes your course content. Well-named areas, sections, and documents in you online course will act as advance organizers for the information in your course, allowing your online students to better understand the course and its priorities. Module, section, and document titles are very important in an online course environment and, when well-named, can aid in the orientation and the ability to navigate, find, retain information about, and recall your course content.

Remember that you are still in the DRAFT stage; anything can be changed, revised, re-sequenced, and rewritten during the development phase of your course.

## Best Practices

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### Suggestions

1. Start your course with an ice breaking activity.
2. Keep the number of modules in your course between five and nine.
3. Create a culminating activity that brings closure to the course and elicits feedback from students that may be used for future revisions.
4. Consider areas of your course for class community type of activities (where students can meet each other and talk about noncourse-related issues).
5. Consider private communication with students.
6. Consider mechanisms to create and archive class/course announcements.

### Now what?

Once you have your list of modules and are happy with the design, titles, and sequence of your course “chunks,” you can begin to set that structure up in your **course development tool**. It is a good online course design practice to begin each module with an overview of the objectives and activities that will occur in that section of the course. Therefore, as you create the structure for your course in your **course development tool**, create a blank “overview” document for each of the modules in your course for this purpose.

### What do I put in my Course Module Overview Documents?

Each of the modules in your course should have an overview that describes for students the details of assignments and due dates for that module. Instead of “Overview,” this section might be called, for example, “What’s due when?” Students should always have a clear understanding of instructor expectations.

### To achieve this, your course needs:

1. A thorough description of the learning activities.
2. Clear and explicit details of your expectations for participation in the course.
3. Clear and explicit details on how you will evaluate/assess student work and participation.
4. Comprehensive instructions on how to create, participate, submit, or accomplish every learning activity.
5. A complete and final course schedule.
6. An orientation to each module reiterating activities, due dates, and any other pertinent information.
7. Clear, logically organized, and consistent module structure, including well-named documents that might indicate the type of activity, due date, or time frame.

Including these elements as part of your course will go a long way towards adequately orienting the student to the course and its requirements.

Now that you have created a blank overview for each of the modules the structure of your course begins to take shape. You are now ready to revisit each overview document and insert content. The important thing is to reiterate, reinforce, and orient the student to any information pertinent to the successful completion of the module and to have that information in one document at the head of each module. Even if you have this information elsewhere in your course, in the Course Information section, for

example, reiterating information specific to a given module in more detail at the beginning of that module 1.) reinforces and clarifies the information for the student, 2.) serves to set up and introduce the module and the tasks at hand, 3.) forestalls student confusion and discomfort, and 4.) provides multiple information access points students require.

Your overview can be narrative or mapped out in table format. How you describe each module is up to you. Write it with your students in mind. Think about it from the student's perspective and what a student would like or need to know to begin a course module. "What's due when?" is a good place to start.

**Your module overview document should cover the following:**

- Goals or objectives for the specific module (e.g., what the student should expect to get out of it.)
- Where the module exists in context of the course, and how the module fits into other modules and into the course in general.
- Learning activities for the module: what students will be doing as they work through the module. Keep in mind that reading subject content is a learning activity, as are any "off-line" activities, such as interviews or observations, which you might require students to do as part of your course. Other activities might include discussions and written assignments such as papers, essays, or tests.
- Methods of evaluation: How will student work in the module be evaluated? All modules need not have a learning activity associated with evaluation. But, for those that do, students should be aware of the evaluation criteria.
- An explicit time frame for completion of the module. It should also highlight the due dates for any learning activities.

## Online Activities

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### Online Course Activities

Continue to:

- Participate as a student in the online asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own online course.
- Reflect on your who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be perceived as an online educator.
- Consider who your students will be and what your assumptions might be about them,
- Consider teaching and learning online in general, and on the online course design/development process.
- Observe some exemplar online courses to see how the instructors structured the modules and learning activities in their online courses.
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Create your course modules using your **course development tool**.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

In the third step you:

- Reviewed best practices and used/adapted them to “chunk” your course into modules.
- Had the opportunity to observe some exemplar online courses.
- Created the overview documents in your **course development tool** for each of your online course modules.
- Learned to create, reorder, rename, and move course modules, sections, and documents in your **course development tool**.
- Continued your participation in the online course discussions and activities.

*You are now ready to move on to the next **Step: 4. Build!***

## Step 4: Build

### Overview, Purpose, and Objectives

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#### Overview

To be an effective online instructor you will need to engage in behaviors that are likely to result in high levels of learning and student satisfaction. To achieve this goal your course must be focused on creating an environment that is learner/learning-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Utilizing the seven principles of good practice detailed below will help you to achieve this goal. You also need to understand the nature of online, asynchronous learning, and in particular how to adapt and cultivate social and teaching presence, and a sense of class community into practice and strategies that will work well.

#### Purposes

The purposes of this step are to:

- Provide an overview of best practices in online teaching and learning.
- Provide an in-depth review of what constitutes, and how to design for successful and effective online “Teaching Presence.”
- Sequence and list your course learning activities for each module in your course structure.
- Create learning activity documents in your **course development tool**.
- Consider how you will evaluate/assess each activity.
- Become proficient in the use of your **course development tool**, including editing, renaming, moving, adding, deleting, and changing documents.
- Learn how to view your online course from the student perspective and explore the course online interface from that perspective.

#### Objectives

In this step you will:

- Consider the three components of online “Teaching Presence” and use them to inform the design choices and decisions in the design of your online learning activities.
- Create a list, description, and outline of your course learning activities for each of your online course modules and course areas.
- Organize, sequence, pace, and name each activity.
- Create the overview document for each of your activities in your **course development tool**, including how the activity will be evaluated, and links to rubrics and models.
- Create an instructional document of each of your activities that includes details for successful completion.
- Learn to create, edit, delete, order, rename, and move your course modules, sections, and documents in your **course development tool**.
- Become familiar with the student perspective of your course.

## Background

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### The Theory: Designing Effective Online Learning Environments

#### How People Learn

Good learning environments *are knowledge centered* in that they consider desired outcomes. Guiding questions for creating a knowledge-centered learning environment include: What do we want students to know and be able to do when they have completed our materials or course? How do we provide learners with the “foundational knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for successful transfer”?

Good learning environments are also *learner-centered*, that is, they function in a manner that connects to the strengths, interests, and preconceptions of learners and help students to gain insight about themselves as learners. In such environments, teachers work to bridge new content with students’ current understandings and facilitate growth while attending to the learners’ interests, passions, and motivations.

Another characteristic of good learning environments is that they are *community-centered*, that is, they promote and benefit from shared norms that value learning and high standards. Ideally, good learning environments connect to relevant external communities and provide a milieu where students feel safe to ask questions, work collaboratively, and develop lifelong learning skills.

Finally, good learning environments are *assessment-centered*, meaning that they provide learners with many opportunities to make their thinking visible and to get feedback in order to create new meaning and new understanding.

Adapted from (Bransford, 2000)

#### The seven principles of good practice in Online Teaching and Learning

Principle 1: The developer/instructor encourages student-faculty contact and interaction.

Principle 2: The developer/instructor encourages student cooperation and reciprocity.

Principle 3: The developer/instructor encourages active learning.

Principle 4: The developer/instructor gives prompt feedback.

Principle 5: The developer/instructor emphasizes time on task.

Principle 6: The developer/instructor communicates high expectations.

Principle 7: The developer/instructor respects diverse talents and ways of learning

(Chickering, 1987)

#### Cognitive, Social, and Teaching Presence

Successful and effective online teaching and learning environments are designed to promote high levels of:

**Cognitive Presence:** “the extent to which students are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse in a community of inquiry” and it is achieved in concert with effective teaching presence and satisfactory social presence.

**Social Presence:** the “ability of students to project themselves socially and effectively into a community of inquiry” and is deemed critical in the absence of physical presence and attendant teacher immediacy necessary to sustain learning in the classroom.

**Teaching Presence:** “the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the realization of personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes.” Teaching presence has three components (1) instructional design and organization, (2) discourse facilitation, and (3) direct instruction. (Garrison D. R., 2000)

### Class Community

Community has been defined in many ways, and various authors have focused on different elements of community including trust, spirit, connectedness, belonging, membership, various forms of support, and the rich, productive milieu that communities of practice can engender for teaching and learning.

Current research reveals that online collaborations between the instructor and students, and between students themselves, positively and significantly influence student satisfaction and perceived learning. Re-conceptualizing your classroom activities for the virtual classroom and building opportunities for such interactions into the design of your course, as in the collaborative projects, small group work, and interaction with you, will be a fun, challenging key to success.

Adapted from (Rovai, Building Sense of Community at a Distance) (Wenger, Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity, 1998) (Wenger, Communities of practice: learning as a social system, 1998) (Scardamalia, 1996)

## Readings and Resources

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### Readings

- *Step 4* in the course manual.

### Videos:

- [Leveraging Technology for Instructional Purposes](#) (Minilog playlist)
- [Creating/Presenting Online Content](#) (Minilog playlist)

### Presentation:

- [Teaching Presence and Class Community presented by Alexandra Pickett \(Duration: 00:66:05\)](#)

### Additional Resources:

- [Teaching online pedagogical repository \(UCF\)](#)
- [A Follow-up Investigation of "Teaching Presence" in the SUNY Learning Network](#), JALN, Volume 7, Issue 2 - July 2003, Peter J. Shea, Alexandra M. Pickett, and William E. Pelz.
- [UDL at a Glance](#), Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)
- [UDL Guidelines - Examples and Resources](#)
- [Accessibility Resources](#)
- <http://www.go2web20.net/>: One site to help you select technologies to enhance your online instruction.

## From Theory to Practice: Devise the Learning Activities for Your Online Course

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To be an effective online instructor you will need to engage in behaviors that are likely to result in high levels of learning and student satisfaction. To achieve this goal your course must be focused on creating an environment that is learner/learning-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Utilizing the seven principles of good practice detailed above will help you to achieve this goal. You also need to understand the nature of online, asynchronous learning, and in particular how to adapt and cultivate social and teaching presence, and a sense of class community into practice and strategies that will work well.

### What is a Learning Activity?

In this step you will identify, organize, and create the learning activities and related documents for each of the modules in your course. In the online environment, a "Learning Activity" represents what students actually do in the course, both on- and offline tasks and assignments. Whether they read a journal article, a textbook chapter, a lecture, write papers or essays, participate in discussions, take tests, give presentations, conduct surveys, do observations, conduct experiments--these are all learning activities. The [Teaching online pedagogical repository](#), is an excellent resource for effective, engaging, learner-centered online activities and ideas.

Think about instruction in this environment in terms of *conversion*. Rather than duplicating the traditional classroom environment, convert your learning activities to adapt to the options and features—as well as the constraints and limitations—of the online environment. You may be wondering how to engage students, keep them motivated, and actively involved in your course in an asynchronous environment.

Some relevant questions to ask yourself when trying to design the learning activities for your course:

- How do I normally teach? What do my students do? What types of things do I do in my regular classroom, or teaching environment?
- Do I lecture, give assignments, require students to read or produce presentations, work in groups, write, take tests, engage in discussions, perform experiments, or special projects?
- Can my activities be converted and be effective learning experiences for my students, or do I have to re-conceptualize activities to achieve the learning objective in the online medium?
- What features exist online that do not exist in a traditional classroom setting? Are they appropriate for the course I intend to create? Can they enhance my teaching or the learning experience?
- What are the limitations and constraints of the online medium?
- What do I expect my students to accomplish during the course? At the end of the course, what do they need to have produced or have learned? How can I design the learning activities to help my students develop the insights, understanding, knowledge, and ability that are essential to successful

completion of my course? What kinds of learning activities in this environment will help them to apply their critical thinking to real world challenges?

### Identify Your Learning Activities

Just as your pedagogical objectives, the nature of course content, your personal style, and the features and constraints of the web shaped the module structure of your course, they will also shape section structure and specific learning activities.

This will be a paper and pencil activity. You will create a DRAFT list of the learning activities for each of the modules in your course, and then group the activities in a logical and consistent manner across each module. (This list will eventually be used to create the documents and section structure that will organize the learning materials for each of your modules you create in **your course development tool**.)

### How do I go about identifying the learning activities of my modules?

1. List the learning activities that you envision for each of your modules. Give a DRAFT name or title for each activity.
2. Do you foresee students working through your learning activities in a specific order? If so, DRAFT the list of the learning activities in that order. If not, list them in a logical order for each module.
3. Does a pattern of activities emerge? For example, your activities may logically group by task or date. Grouping the activities in a logical and consistent scheme across modules will help to organize your materials and activities. Consistency in the structure and order of activities across modules also helps students in their understanding and navigation of the course, materials, and activities.

### Naming Your Learning Activities

Create a brief, clear DRAFT title for each learning activity. Consider including due dates and type of task in the title. Use consistent naming conventions across modules, especially for similar types of activities. Once you create your learning activities documents in your **course development tool** you will want to view them on the web to determine how they appear to students.

Remember that you are still in DRAFT phase of your course development process. Anything can be changed, revised, and rewritten during this phase.

### How do I best sequence my learning activities within a module?

Now that you have decided on the general module framework, your task is to plan out your learning activities within each module. At this stage, sequencing and consistency become primary considerations. A well-designed course will be consistent and logical in its presentation and organization.

For example, a typical module could begin with an overview, followed by some introductory material or lecture. Students are then typically given tasks, such as a reading or writing assignment, participation in a discussion, or some other project or activity. Keep in mind that just because the course is online doesn't mean that all activities have to take place online.

Some relevant questions to ask yourself when considering the sequence of the learning activities for each module are:

- What does the student need to know or do before they can begin an activity? For example, does the student need to have completed some other reading before reading your lecture or before beginning work on a writing or discussion activity?
- What does the student need in order to accomplish or participate in the activity? For example, does the student need to participate in the discussion before writing an essay?

Some relevant questions to ask yourself when considering the quantity of the learning activities for each module are:

- How much work do I expect from students in my traditional class? (You should expect the same quantity and quality of work from your online students.)
- How many students will be in this class? (For example, depending on your objectives, your involvement in class discussions, or the number of written assignments can be more with fewer students, or fewer with a large class.)
- How much time, realistically, do I have to devote to this class per week?
- How are assignments prioritized, weighted, and evaluated?

Some relevant questions to ask yourself when considering the pacing of the learning activities for each module are:

- How long should it take students to accomplish a given task/activity? What are my expectations of pacing in a traditional teaching environment?
- What issues specific to the online environment might affect those expectations?
- How long should I allow myself to respond to students and their work?

### How do I best organize the information in my course?

Your **course development tool** will provide you with a variety of options for organizing your course materials and learning activities, and provide you with an assortment of features and course management tools. The interfaces may vary, but most structures are linear, hierarchical, and may be pre-sorted by task or functionality.

Before you create your first learning activity, give some thought to the overall organization of your materials in the context of the options and limitations of the tool you are using. Developing a logical, consistent framework for your materials will help students understand and navigate course information and tasks.

Most current **course development tools** provide the following general structural elements to help you define and present your course framework:

- The Course Home Page is automatically generated to provide a consistent interface for all courses created with your **course development tool**. It organizes your course into areas: course information, learning modules, and other course areas. It also provides the navigational interface for the site with access links to email, etc. (Garrison D. R., 2000)

- The Module View is the framework or outline of an individual module or section of your course content, generated according to the structure of each module.
- Modules provide a general framework for the units of the course. They establish the scope of content for a particular unit and organize materials and activities into broad instructional or conceptual units.
- Module Sections are used to further define your framework by organizing modules into logical and consistent sections. Sections can be further used to organize course activities by types of tasks, time frames, logical topics, or by conceptual or metaphorical categories.
- Documents are the pages that contain course content.

### How do I make sure my students know where to go and what to do throughout my course?

Your **course development tool** will have built-in navigational buttons and a web interface that facilitates students' navigation through all the levels of web screens. However, don't assume that your students will know what to do and where to go next. Explicit navigational cues and documents that contain instructions will alert students about what to do next.

For maximum effectiveness, create consistent navigational instructions. Consistency is achieved by such things as similar wording, font and location for instructions on each page. Section and document titles may be used to highlight a type of task, a due date or a time frame.

## Best Practices

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### Course Navigation Tips!

Use the following tips to make sure your students will be able to effectively and efficiently navigate the pages and activities in your course.

- **Create instructional documents.**  
You should create documents that set up the directions and expectations you have for your various learning activities, such as for a discussion or written assignment activity, so that there is no confusion about what you expect them to do.
- **Create and use instructional cues.**  
Instructional cues are the instructions and directions that explicitly help students navigate the pages of your course and your learning activities efficiently. Instructions are very important in an asynchronous learning environment. Students need to know what to do and be able to access information quickly and without difficulty to avoid distraction from the task. For example, if you want them to go to the Discussion Area of your course and to respond to a discussion question you have posted, clear instructions are necessary.
- **Use Module, section, and document titles to organize and convey information about the activities, content, and structure of the course.**  
Whatever type of framework you decide upon for the organization and presentation of your course activities, the module, section, or document titles are the way you will implement it. Consider using titles to specify the type of activity, due date, time frame, etc. The more information you can put in the framework the students see from the module view, the more comfortable and confident your students will be with what they are to do.
- **Refer to the Course Navigation bars, links, and buttons.**  
Your course pages will have a navigation bar and links to help students navigate and interact with course pages. Encourage students to use them by referring to them with your instructional cues.
- **Make information accessible.**  
If students have to travel too far to find what they need or want in the course by having to click too many successive documents or scrolling through very long documents, you risk student disorientation and discouragement. The structure created by descriptively named and well-categorized documents/learning activities makes your course more accessible.
- **Balance your course structure.**  
Strike a balance between excessive outlining and a relatively flat and undescriptive course structure.
- **Limit the number of hypertext links per page.**  
If you link to web sites outside your course area, make sure students are aware that they are navigating away from the page and know how to return. Create links to other modules or to other areas within a module only if necessary. Because of the nature of hypertext, it is important to make sure students understand where they are and where their documents are going when creating responses and interacting with your learning activities.

## Build a Sense of Class Community

Research supports the definition of learning as a *social process*. Online courses designed to promote a sense of class community, with ample opportunities for interaction and the social construction of knowledge, result in teaching and learning communities of satisfied students and faculty. Interactions between students, and in particular the quantity and quality of interaction between the student and the instructor, affect faculty and student satisfaction and often improve student perception of learning.

Encourage a sense of class community in your course; provide community-building opportunities, and activities that involve interactions and collaborations.

- Provide students ample opportunities for interaction with the instructor and with others in the course.
- Use directed learning activities to provide students with opportunities to engage and actively interact with the content.
- Create opportunities for interaction with students and between students.
- Include activities that build a sense of class community: personal profiles, introductions, areas in the course for noncourse-related interaction, and areas in the course that support access to and interaction with the instructor and other students.
- Design activities that create a sense of connectedness among course participants, that build social/group spirit, and that foster a sense of trust.
- Create a learning environment that is engaging with supportive contact and interaction and that permits the sharing of, and reflection about, educational expectations and experiences.

### Suggestions that work!

When designing collaborative learning activities consider these:

- How big are the small groups? The nature of the activity should determine group size.
- Are the students prepared to work in small groups? Make students aware from the beginning of the class that they will be doing this kind of activity. You may want to model the activity for students at the beginning of the course so they become comfortable with it.
- Are you letting students choose their own groups? In an online course unless you manage it extremely well, it could take them the whole term for students to get themselves into groups. : ) I recommend assigning groups... you can ask the students questions in the beginning of the course, if the groups would be better organized by common interest... Also, don't assign groups as the students enter the course, otherwise you will have all the early bird overachievers in the first group.
- Is your online group activity well explained in terms of instructions and expectations? Do students know what to do, when, what you expect, and how you will evaluate student work? Ambiguity may be amplified in an online course. Model the activity necessary skills by utilizing "warm-up" activities to get team members to know each other. If your students report difficulty finding the appropriate activity, enhanced explanatory documentation may be indicated.
- Create a page in the module that gives them links right to the page you want them to go to initiate the activity. Make one link for each group of students. Be redundant with your explanations. If your students are used to following the course linearly and you then ask them to go to another spot in the course to do an activity, it may throw them some confusion resulting in decreased participation... if a

collaborative activity is not turning out as you expected, it likely needs more instruction, explanation, and direction.

- Is the objective of the group activity clear? Have discreet milestones been identified? Are timeframes associated with each activity been identified? Is there a required outcome or output for the group/activity? Have evaluation criteria been outlined? How will the work of individual team members be evaluated? What constitutes successful completion of the activity? If one student ends up doing all the work for the group, then it was obviously not a well-designed activity. Are directions and locations built into the course to organize, contain, and display the group's work and final output? How will the activity wrap-up?
- Avoid making too many assumptions about group work. Groups need design and direction to succeed. Do students have adequate cooperative skills to accomplish the activity? Can they achieve the complex tasks required? They need practice leading up to complex group work... Can they coordinate their work with the others in the group? Do they know each other? The instructor must design the activity, manage the activity, and monitor it for each individual to teach them how to successfully interact in a team/group activity.

Learning is social in nature and online learning environments can be designed to reflect and capitalize upon the social nature of learning. Community can play a critical role in building and sustaining productive online learning and satisfying online teaching and learning experiences.

## The Communities of Inquiry Model (Col)

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In this manual the [Communities of Inquiry Model](#)\* is used as the theoretical framework and foundation that informs our understanding of effective practices in online course design and teaching practices.

According to the authors of the model, “An educational community of inquiry is a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.”

The Community of Inquiry model is depicted as a Venn diagram of three overlapping and interdependent elements: social, teaching, and cognitive presence. Each presence is made up of several indicators that work in combination to describe the “process of creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience.”

**Social Presence** is “the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities.” (Garrison, 2009)

**Teaching Presence** is defined as the “design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes.” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

**Cognitive Presence** is the “extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse.” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001).

\* (Garrison D. R., 2000)

## Social Presence: What is it? Why is it important? How is it created?

In an online teaching and learning environment, establishing a strong social presence is essential to establish the learning climate, build trust, and develop a strong sense of class community. It can be used to enhance the learning experience. Online instructors can effectively cultivate online group cohesion, incorporate affective elements, and promote positive interaction in online instruction.

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### Social Presence is made up of three indicators:

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1. Affective Expression
2. Interaction
3. Group Cohesion

#### 1. Affective Expression: Why do I want it?

To support and facilitate social interaction in an online web-based teaching and learning environment

1. To promote student engagement with each other.
2. To promote a sense of student belonging to the course.
3. To establish a sense of class community, including trust for the instructor and classmates. Trust is essential to the learning environment.
4. To allow students to form impressions of others in the course that allow them to view others as “real.”

#### How do I create it?

1. Use appropriate emotion, humor, and self-disclosure. This is NOT the same as being “chummy” with your students. Model it in your welcome, introductions, interactions, and online discussions. Use your interactions (in “voice,” “tone,” and images) to convey **your** personality. This should help students form distinct impressions of you and encourage them to appropriately self-disclose.
2. Leverage course profiles – photos, interests, etc.
3. Create spaces for social interaction in the course.
4. Create opportunities for non-course related interactions. Examples: a bulletin board, virtual coffee house, suggestion box.
5. Create an introductory discussion/interaction to give students a chance to get to know each other and frame the discussion with questions about prior knowledge and expectations of the course.

#### Examples:

- <http://voicethread.com/share/3084120/> – Icebreaking/Introductions (an introduction to the instructor through the eyes of her young daughter)
- <http://etap640.edublogs.org/2012/06/26/love-letter-to-my-students/> – voice/trust/community
- <http://bit.ly/iM4P5z> – Voki speaking avatar welcome. (A personalized welcome, with the instructor’s actual voice.)

#### 2. Interaction: Why do I want it?

To support a sense of **open communication** in the teaching and learning environment.

1. So that students feel comfortable conversing.
2. So that students feel comfortable participating in discussion.
3. So that students feel comfortable interacting with you and their classmates.

### How do I create it?

1. Start with an introductory discussion at the beginning of the course. Provide models and timely feedback.
2. Provide explicit expectations about interaction. Example:  
<http://etap640.edublogs.org/2009/12/17/my-discussion-post-grading-rubric>
3. Ask questions. End each post in your discussions with a question, so that the conversation continues and so that you can get the students to dig deeper. Instructor contributions can sometimes halt student discussions. By asking a probing question at the end of your posts, you can continue a thread of discussion to promote and create additional depth in the interaction.
4. Quote directly from a previous post in a discussion.
5. Refer explicitly to others by name in the discussion.
6. Express compliments and appreciation. Never underestimate your power. If you have high expectations, your student will rise to them.
7. Express agreement.

### 3. Group Cohesion: Why do I want it?

To create a sense of class community in the online teaching and learning environment.

1. Allow students to disagree with you and with classmates. Disagreement requires a sense of trust based on permission and a solid comprehension of expectations.
2. Allow students to express their point of view to other students.
3. Use discussion to help students build a sense of collaboration in the course and feel positive about contributions that help them make sense of the course for themselves and their classmates.

### How do I create it?

1. Provide expectations for interactions, including netiquette. Provide examples and models to ensure understanding. Give students permission to disagree and show how to do that.
2. Model these behaviors yourself.
3. “Speak” to them. Use salutations in your posts. Refer to students by name in your posts. Use inclusive pronouns.
4. Give students ample opportunities to interact with you, the content, and each other.
5. Let students do the work.
6. Let students help each other. Example: Create an *ask a question* area – where students can help each other.
7. Let students evaluate each other’s work.

# Teaching Presence

## Instructional Design and Organization

- Creating a strong social presence, sense of trust, and the understanding that those in the class, including the instructor, are real people, is essential to building a strong sense of class community. Creating opportunities for students to get to know each other and to interact with the instructor at the start of the course can “break the ice.” Include ice-breaking activities in your first module.
- In addition to the social and trust activities, practical activities can be designed to help students achieve comfort and familiarity with the features and functionalities of the learning management system. Include a discussion and an assignment submission area, so students can practice these technical skills before course assignments begin.
- In addition to titling course modules, also assign a number to them. Be sure your Course Schedule coincides with the numbers and titles given to modules.
- Courses with several discussion areas or assignment submissions in one module can be very confusing to students since the view of the module may expand beyond one web page. Consider how you will manage large volume areas in a module, or create additional modules.
- Use consistent terminology in all documents. For example, “submit” rather than “save” or “reply” rather than “respond.” There may be LMS-specific terminology. The keys are accuracy and consistency. Also, don't refer to the assignment submission process as “emailing assignments to me.”
- Remember that large or multiple graphics affect the loading of your course pages on the web.
- Check all hypertext links within your documents each time you teach the course. Links to external web sites must be verified to make sure they are still operational.
- If using small group work areas that require students to exchange files, stipulate a standard for file attachments. If students are exchanging word-processed documents, students should use the compatible file formats listed on the written assignment form. Stress that students need to have virus-detection software installed on their computers.
- If document format is important to the grade of an assignment, students must submit the assignment as a file attachment. You need to be familiar with the file attachment submission process and how to write the appropriate evaluation of the student's work.
- Use the forms and features available to you in your **course development tool** created especially for communications, assignments, tests, and evaluations. Wherever possible, avoid conducting any course-related activities outside the course via email. Student email is not reliable. Students may provide incorrect information, or their email addresses may change during the course of a semester, or they may use unrecognizable email names.

- Provide thorough explanations and descriptions of what students will do along with specific expectations and requirements associated with learning activities in the Course Information area of your course. The more students know, the less likely it is that they will be confused.
- If your **course development tool** does not provide a spell-check feature for students, you need to clarify and instruct the students on this requirement. Students should then word process written assignments or discussion responses off-line within their word processor so they have the use of a spell and grammar checker. You should familiarize yourself with the student interface and course functionality so you can give accurate instructions to students on how to participate in the course.
- Schedule due dates with the understanding that many online students are employed on weekends. A weekday afternoon is a good time for an assignment deadline as the student has the weekend to finish the assignment and time to get help if they experience any technical problems with submitting their assignment. For example, make due dates Monday afternoon rather than late Friday night or midnight on the weekend. Avoid late night deadlines or when a module will open, unless you plan to be online at that time.
- Don't complain about technology problems to students.
- Be positive and supportive when students mention or experience technical problems. Complaints give the impression of instability and affect the student's confidence in using the system. If there is a HelpDesk available, encourage students to contact it for assistance in resolving technical issues.
- Be familiar with and check your course from the student perspective during the development and delivery cycles of your course. Familiarity and understanding of the student interface and course functionality are important as you give instructions to students on how to participate in your course.
- Become familiar with the assignment submission process: the limitations of copy/paste, smart quotes issue, how to open file attachments, creating an evaluation, and/or what to do if file attachment isn't a compatible file format.

## **Create Areas for Communication/Interaction/Engagement in your Online Course**

Quantity and quality of interaction with the instructor has a significant and positive correlation with student satisfaction and reported learning. Create a strong sense of class community in your course and mechanisms for interaction and engagement with your students. Opportunities for interaction and engagement between your students will have a positive effect on the levels of satisfaction in your course.

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### **Create Ice-Breaking Activities to start your course**

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#### **What is it?**

An Ice Breaker is an introductory and generally non-graded activity, or series of activities that engages all students as they begin the course. As both orientation and community-building strategies, good online ice-breaking activities present online students with opportunities to get to know each other in an interactive discussion, to help each other, to build trust, to try out the features/functionality of the environment that will be used in the class, to talk about what they already know about the course topic, or why they are taking the course, to talk about why they are taking the course online, and/or to practice with and navigate the environment, etc. An ice-breaking activity might also function as an opportunity to troubleshoot technical difficulties prior to the start of the course, or to assess skill level, prior knowledge, or interests that can inform activities later in the course.

#### **How should it be used?**

The Ice Breaker is used to break the ice at the start of the course.

#### **When do I use it?**

Ice Breakers are generally set up at the start of a course as one of the first introductory activities in a course.

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### **Create a Personal Profile**

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#### **What is it?**

Your online **course development tool** will provide you with a way to create a personal “Profile.” It may give the ability to provide a biographical sketch; a way to introduce the members of your course to each other. Using this feature is one way to begin to develop a sense of class community in the course by helping those in the online course to get to know each other, and to learn some things about each other. Usually profiles are collected in an area for that purpose in your course and are a form that you fill out that allows for the inclusion of a photo/avatar, text, and links.

#### **How should it be used?**

The profile is used to by members of your course to introduce themselves to each other.

#### **When do I use it?**

Profiles are generally filled out as one of the first introductory activities in an online course. You should create a profile to introduce yourself to your class and direct your students to do the same as one of their “ice-breaking” activities to get the course started.

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## Create a “Talk with the Professor” Area

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### What is it?

"Talk with the Professor" is a simple discussion area you can add to your course that allows all course participants to post public questions or comments. For example, a "Talk with the Professor" area functions as a discussion area specifically designed for student-professor interaction. Research shows that a student's satisfaction and online learning are significantly and positively affected by the quantity and quality of interaction with his/her professor. This area demonstrates instructor accessibility to students.

### How should it be used?

The "Talk with the Professor" area provides an opportunity for students to talk with you analogous to a asking you a question before or after class, or perhaps in the hall. The substance of the question may or may not deal directly with the content of the course but allows nonetheless allows students to ask general questions of you in a public forum.

### When do I use it?

As the instructor, look for questions in the "Talk with the Professor" area of each module and respond to them in a timely manner. Likewise, you might initiate discussion and ask questions.

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## Create a Bulletin Board area for your Online Course

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### What is it?

The Bulletin Board is essentially a discussion outside of a particular course content area. Just as students have the opportunity to talk or chat with each other or with the instructor when taking a conventional classroom course, they should also have the opportunity to do so in an online course. The Bulletin Board provides this opportunity. Your online **course development tool** may have a built in mechanism to facilitate this function.

### How should it be used?

You may want to create a specific area in your course to locate “class community” activities. The Bulletin Board is space available only to students enrolled in your class to post and/or read messages and respond. These can include questions or comments to other students and the instructor about the course. Students may also talk about non-course related subjects. This is a good place to make or archive announcements.

### When do I use it?

You should check the Bulletin Board area regularly and use the Bulletin Board to make announcements, or to respond to students' questions.

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## Create and use Class Announcements

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### What is it?

Your online **course development tool** will provide you ways make class announcements.

Announcements will generally appear at the top of your course home page, or come as notifications to your students in the messaging system.

### How should it be used?

An announcement is used to display a brief class message to all students.

### When do I use it?

You should use the announcement mechanism for communication to the class. (There may be other features and functions in your course management tool to facilitate various types of class communications.) You can use announcements to direct the students to other course areas, to call attention to an activity or event, to remind students of due dates, or to encourage students to participate. This is one of the most simple, effective, and visible means to make your “presence” known and felt in the course.

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## Create/Use a Standard Mechanism for Asking a Question

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### What is it?

A mechanism should be built into your course whereby a student can ask you a content-related question from virtually any location in the course. While your online **course development tool** will provide ways to interact privately with students, most questions posted by your students can be posted publically.

While your online **course development tool** will provide ways to interact privately with students, most questions posted by your students can be public. If one student has a question, it is likely that another has the same question. Answering it once in a public location, or encouraging students to answer each other’s questions in this area will make this course management activity more efficient, while also giving students the opportunity to express their own social and teaching presences.

### How should it be used?

Essentially, the Announcements section provides students with the opportunity to "raise their hand" from anywhere in your course, whether to ask a question or request clarification, further information, or explanation.

### When do I use it?

Check the Question Areas that you have created in your course frequently and respond to questions in a timely manner.

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## Create a Mechanism/Areas in your online course to Obtain Feedback from students

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### What is it?

We recommend that you gather feedback from your students throughout the course in a variety of ways:

- Create a suggestion box that is open for the duration of the course, and encourage students to use it to report bugs, Type-Os, and suggestions for improvements to the course.
- Create a midterm survey to request student feedback, comments, and suggestions for course improvements.

- Create a formal or informal request for more descriptive feedback from the students at the end of the course to help you review, revise and improve the course.
  - Valuable information about your course from the student perspective, which will help improve your understanding of online teaching and learning.
  - Valuable feedback that you can use in the evaluation and revision of your course for the next time you teach it.

### How should it be used?

We encourage you to use a variety of mechanisms to get feedback on the course from your students. Asking simple questions about what is working and what can be improved in the course will give you valuable information and help you better understand the student experience and perspective. Using student feedback to inform the evaluation and revision of your course is an important component in your development as online faculty and in your course design process. This evaluation and revision cycle is something you should do every time you teach/re-teach a course.

### When do I use it?

Collecting descriptive feedback at the end of the course will give you information you can use to review, revise and improve your course design and your online teaching practices the next time you deliver the course. However, there is also valuable information that can be gained from collecting such information during the course, at midterm for example, that can give you the opportunity to make some adjustments in the course based on current student feedback and experiences. Students will appreciate your willingness to inquire and to consider making some immediate adjustments in response to their feedback.

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## Create an area and provide activities in your online course to bring course closure (Culminating Activities)

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### What is it?

We recommend that you create an area in your course as a means to "wrap-up" your course and bring closure to the course for your students. Activities can include:

- A farewell discussion.
- A request for tips and suggestions for future students of the course.
- A farewell post/letter/announcement from the instructor.
- The end of course collection of descriptive feedback.
- Any formal departmental/institutional course and faculty evaluations would go in this area.

### How should it be used?

It is recommended that you create a module in your course dedicated to course closure activities. This will provide a dedicated area and space for these activities to be located, presented, and to take place. By not having them integrated physically into other course content modules also helps to demarcate them as end of course and course closure activities.

### When do I use it?

Generally this would appear toward the end of the course, and the activities may open and run concurrently with the last course content module.

## Using Small Groups in Your Online Course

Quantity and quality of interaction with other students in the class also has a significant and positive correlation with student satisfaction and reported learning. By creating a strong sense of class community in your course and by creating mechanisms for interaction and engagement between and among your students you can positively affect satisfaction in your course. Consider how you might incorporate cooperative or collaborative learning activities designed to engage pairs or groups of individuals in learning and content.

- Keep group size small: two or three students seem to work best. Smaller groups are more effective and take less time.
- Prepare students to work in cooperative groups. Explain to students why you are using cooperative learning, do a short cooperative learning activity, then have them explain how it can help them. Initially, do short get-acquainted and review activities.
- Teach students appropriate interaction skills. Ask students to contribute to a class list of appropriate group behaviors. Examples: stay on task, contribute ideas, help others learn, encourage everyone to participate, listen with care, and show respect for others. Display the list and remind students to use them. Add to the list as needed.
- Avoid letting students choose their own groups. Students need to develop positive working relationships with all class members. Randomly assign students to groups. Change groups often enough so that no one gets stuck for long periods with the same class members.
- Conduct cooperative online activities often enough for students to develop cooperative skills. Have students do something cooperative regularly in class to reinforce positive, cooperative habits. If nothing else, have them share what they learned with a partner.
- Plan cooperative learning activities with care. You can't just put students in groups, tell them to work together, and wonder why the groups aren't successful. Cooperative learning groups have five essential elements (positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and processing). Built carefully into a small group learning activity these elements will create an environment where students can learn well together.
- Make sure your cooperative groups can complete simple tasks successfully before moving on to more complex ones. Students must be taught how to learn together. Start with short, simple activities and progress to longer and more significant ones, as your students are successful. Have frequent class discussions on what helps the groups do well.
- Avoid emphasizing paper or project completion as a group goal. With completion as the only goal, there's nothing to stop one student from doing the work and the others from "hitchhiking." Group assignments should ensure individual accountability.
- Provide a clear learning goal. A clear group-learning goal is one whose achievement is easily measured. Example: The activity is concluded when every member in your group can explain the work and/or pass a quiz.

- Don't assume that students will magically develop needed social skills. You must teach them how to coordinate their work with others and include others in the process. Do this by helping them understand the need for skills, giving detailed instructions, and providing models that show students exactly what to do and reinforce that you will "watch" their interactions and activity online. Finally, offer feedback and coaching until their cooperative skills are automatic.
- Take advantage of the power of positive relationships on achievement. Start every group activity with a get-acquainted or relationship-building discussion, such as "What is something unique about your partner(s) that no one in the class knows or would be able to guess?" Build in initial success by giving review or easier assignments, and then slowly increase the difficulty of the tasks as students gain confidence in their ability to work together.
- Monitor groups carefully by observing interactions and encouraging appropriate learning and teamwork skills. Help groups to ensure mastery by every student. Keep individuals on their toes by asking them at random to explain their group's work.
- Give group grades only when absolutely necessary, absolutely fair for each member, and when you have taught the students how to work together. Assess learning with individual quizzes or papers. Have students assess their own learning by comparing what they can do with criteria.
- Building effective and successful online small group activities is not easy. Cooperative learning is complex, procedural learning, like learning to play a new sport. Plan for ongoing practice in cooperative learning.

Adapted for online learning from (Ledlow, 2002)

## Think before you link!

One of the great things about delivering a course on the web is that you can incorporate links to other documents or to other web sites to support/augment your own materials or to offer further information or explanation. Done well, hypertext links to other web sites or among your own pages can greatly enhance your presentation, materials, and the learning experiences of your students. But just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

### Before creating hypertext links, keep the following in mind:

Be sure you want the student to click on the link you create where you create it. If it is there, the student is likely to click on it to see what is behind it. This will interrupt the flow of the material presented. You may not want the student to click on a link to the Newsweek home page when you mention a Newsweek article in one of your lectures. Also, you should be aware that if the link is to an external web site, students might become distracted, begin surfing, and leave your course all together. You may or may not want to enable that.

If your course is linearly organized, i.e., students must complete Modules 1-4 before entering Module 5, then you will probably not want to insert a link to an external source, in spite of making a reference to it. A good rule of thumb is, create a link only when students should go there at the moment the link is offered. In the example, a link to Module Five would not be advised unless you want them to do something there. Conversely, however, you might want to link from Module Five back to Module One to review something or illustrate a point.

Links are particularly useful to pages that define terms, break out a section of a long document, provide further information on a topic, or to pose a thought/ question.

Linking between course documents is most effective when students understand why they are being directed there, what they should take away from it, and how to find their way back to the course. It is essential that you view your course from the web as a student to ensure that that is the case. If students are deeply involved with Module 3 and you hypertext to Module 5 to submit an assignment, make sure students know where they have saved the assignment so they may retrieve it. Such knowledge is not intuitive and cannot be assumed; instructions are imperative.

On the other hand, too many links may prove confusing, ineffective, and distracting. When inserting a link, consider its importance. What should students receive from it? Consider whether the link will add to the understanding of the information being presented or lead to a task that students are required to complete.

What information already exists within the course and what information must be obtained from secondary external sources?

### **Get feedback on your course from your students**

Add a "culminating activity" to your course to get feedback from your students to assist in course evaluation and revision. Questions might include the following:

**Question 1:** What did you like best about this course?

**Question 2:** What specific things do you think could be improved in the structure or design of the course and learning activities?

**Question 3:** How would you improve the quality and participation in course discussions/interactions?

**Question 4:** What changes would you suggest be made to the pacing or sequence of the content and activities for this course? (e.g., Were the due dates manageable for you? Were the course materials sequenced well?)

**Question 5:** What changes would you suggest be made to the quantity of work required for this course?

**Question 6:** How could the course be improved in terms of my (the instructor's) interaction, participation, and management of the course?

**Question 7:** What other suggestions, comments, or recommendations would you have for the instructor?

Add a "descriptive feedback/metacognitive journaling" section to the course to elicit feedback from students useful for improving pedagogical style.  
(Rodgers, 2006)

**Questions might include the following:**

- 1: What did you learn? Really think about what it means to have learned something.
- 2: Can you say more? Can you give me an example?
- 3: How do you know you learned it?
- 4: What helped your learning? What would have helped your learning more?
- 5: What hindered your learning?
- 6: How did you feel?

Incorporating “feedback” from students improves instructor understanding of “learner-centered” education.

*Learner-centered* is more than caring about your students or understanding their learning preferences. It is not abdicating responsibility in the teaching and learning process but rather accepting the reality/challenge that you need to step aside to give students a voice in, and power over, their own learning. Learner-centered learning is characterized by:

1. A shift from seeing teaching, self, and curriculum as primary towards seeing students and their learning as central.
2. A shift from seeing students as people to be won over (or as adversaries) towards seeing them as partners whose share in power is equal.
3. A shift from seeing teaching as a cause of learning, to seeing teaching as a response to learning. (Just because you teach it doesn't mean it is learned --no teacher is that “powerful.”)

## Accessibility

Your **course development tool** may provide a link to a text-only view of your course for students with visual impairments who use web readers to access your course. Generally a link located at the top of your course homepage provides a text-only way to view and navigate your course. It is generally your responsibility to make sure that the content and design of the pages of your course take web accessibility into account. Check with your instructional technology department for institutional policies and procedures regarding web page accessibility issues in online courses.

### Ten Tips for Testing Your Web Pages for Accessibility

1. Turn off graphics in your web browser, and make sure the ALT text is displayed in place of your informational graphics and that the ALT text makes sense.
2. Consider whether ALT text is really necessary for decorative-only images. If not, assign a null value to the ALT text (alt="").
3. Turn off sounds in your web browser to make sure no important information is lost. Provide alternative transcripts if necessary.
4. Check your web site using a Lynx browser, and/or using an automated web accessibility checker.
5. Use the High Contrast option in the Accessibility Options section of Control Panel in Windows, then restart the browser and make sure each page is still readable.
6. Make sure that text can be resized on your web pages. Test the largest font size supported by the browser (the largest is only available when High Contrast mode is turned on).
7. Check that all areas of your course can be accessed without the use of a mouse. Navigate using the keyboard; make sure TAB traverses all links in reasonable order and that CTRL+TAB moves between panes or sections, and that the text for the links make sense out of context.
8. Check the site map for your course, or the text-only features provided by your **course development tool**.
9. Select all text and copy it to the clipboard, and ensure it makes sense when pasted into a word processor.
10. Check that any forms you use or create in your course provide text “prompts” next to each item so that the fields are associated with what is supposed to go in them.

### **Add ALT tags to your graphics**

The ALT text provides alternative or substitute text for use when an image is not displayed. Don't make the mistake of providing a description of the image without considering what job the image is doing on the page. The ALT text should be composed as an appropriate textual alternative to the image; sometimes that might turn out to be a description of the image.

The "ALT tag" tags any images you import into your course with a text description or alternative of what the graphic is or what it does. For example an image of the cells of a leaf could be tagged "Cells of a leaf viewed through a microscope." If you can click on the image to take you somewhere, you can describe the image and the action that happens when you click on it. For example, a graphic of a can of Pepsi can be tagged "Click on this red can of Pepsi to take you to the Pepsi corporate web site."

Your **course development tool** will have a mechanism to easily add ALT tags to your graphics.

## Facilitating Discourse and Interaction

### Enhance Your Online Content Presentation: Things you can do in your course besides lecture!

Almost any activity can be designed to be carried out in some way or another for an online course. Importantly, the instructor must set up the activity with all the supporting and explanatory documentation necessary for the students to understand fully:

- What they are to do.
- When and where in the course they are to do it.
- What is expected specifically.
- How they will be evaluated.

Areas in the course must be designed and set up in advance by the instructor to account for and accommodate, explain, model, and evaluate each activity. Below are some ideas to get you thinking about what is possible. Check with your institutional academic computing department for instructional design assistance to implement any of these ideas in your online course.

- **Interview:** A formal interview consists of a series of well-chosen questions (and often a set of tasks or problems) that are designed to elicit a portrait of a student's understanding about a concept or set of related concepts. The interview may be conducted as an offline activity and videotaped or audiotaped for later analysis, or online asynchronously. Online course assignments can be designed to prepare interview questions either as individual or small group activities.
- **Guest speaker:** Instructors can bring additional expertise into the "classroom" in the form of virtual guest speakers. The instructor sets up a module or section in the course for the guest speaker, sets up the activity, introduces the guest speaker, requests web access for the guest speaker, and creates the kick-off document for the guest speaker to use to start the discussion or presentation. The Guest then interacts in the course via the web.
- **Student-led discussion:** Often associated with "idea circles." These are peer-led, small group or whole class discussions of concepts fueled by single, or multiple texts. Students work together with a student leader to build abstract understandings from the facts, data, and details provided by a variety of resources. Variations include students assuming the role of the professor, asking guiding questions, and facilitating the discussion.
- **Student summaries:** A single sentence or paragraph. This simple technique challenges students to answer the questions "Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?" (represented by the letters WDWWWHW) about a given topic, and then to synthesize those answers into a simple informative, grammatical, and long summary sentence. Can be used as a pop quiz. See below.
- **Pop quiz:** These quizzes can be used as "curve busters," opportunities for students to earn extra points and improve their grades by answering questions correctly. Pop quizzes are unannounced and can be inserted at any time into any course module. A pop quiz section to each module with an explanatory document can alert students that a pop quiz might occur at any time. Information on the pop quiz aspect of the course should be clearly detailed in the course information documents of the course and in the module at a glance areas of module in which they are likely to occur.

- **Observation:** Observations may include written field notes with detailed accounts of an event, objects or people observed. They run the gamut of disciplines from artistic to scientific observations. The observation is conducted as an offline activity (See related, *Field Trip*). Online course assignments and activities can be designed to prepare observation instruments either as individual or small group activities.
- **Brainstorming:** This is a technique for generating new, useful ideas, and promoting creative thinking. It can be very useful to help generate ideas for projects, encourage shy or reluctant students or solve problems. This activity can be conducted online as a small group discussion or with the class as a whole.
- **Consensus building:** Students are expected to look for key themes of a given topic and post their position. Next, students read others messages, look for an ideal framework and post a message supporting more than one position. In the following stage, students also post a message supporting more than one position. Finally, there is a debriefing, discussion and final evaluation.

A specific example is the Jigsaw method. It is a useful for encouraging cooperation. In this technique, students are arranged in “expert” groups; each group is responsible for developing an approach to solving part of the problem. Students are then rearranged in “home” groups with one person from each of the expert groups and are expected to find an overall solution. The instructor brings the activity together by having each group report their overall solution. This can be organized as an online activity using small groups. Careful planning, explanation, and course document set-up is necessary to have this flow well and in a timely way. *Tip:* As an online activity, the best results are when the instructor assigns members to groups and assigns roles within the groups in advance, rather than letting student self-select into groups, and work out roles.

- **Buzz groups:** A group is divided into sub-groups of 3 to 6 person to discuss an assigned topic or to solve a problem. A representative is sometimes selected from each sub-group to report the findings to the entire group. It allows for total participation by group members through small clusters of participants, followed by discussion of the entire group. A buzz group is used to get participation from every individual in the group. This activity is implemented online via small group discussion activities.
- **Case Histories:** Case teaching presents authentic, concrete discipline specific challenges problems for students to analyze. Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional training in schools of business, law, and medicine. Case histories provide models of how to think professionally about problems. Online case studies or histories can be set up as activities for individual or small group work.
- **Chain story, poem, and article:** The teacher begins e.g., “One morning Ben got up and went to work.” A student is invited to continue with another sentence & so on around the class. You provide the linkers – “and then,” “so,” “next,” ... “finally.” Each person adds to what the previous person told, ending on a cliff-hanger phrase such as, “but suddenly...” or “but when he opened the door he saw...” and so on -- the trick being to work the word in so that it fits the story. This works for poems, articles, and dialogue, too. Every time a new person logs in to the course they add to the

story...This can be set up as an online activity either as a discussion with the class as a whole or in small groups.

- **Chain math or science problem:** The teacher or a student poses a multi-stage problem to which one student after another offer a successive step in its solution. This is done in small groups. Variation: students are given a list of solutions, and asked to create the problems to which they correspond. The instructor identifies the type of problem the solution addresses. This can be set up as an online activity either as a written assignment with the "save for class" option and including the class as a whole or in small groups. Every time a new person logs in to the course, they add a step to the solution or problem. The first person to save their response gets the credit for that level. Duplicate or concurrent respondents have to redo their response at a different level.
- **Charts:** Teacher- or student-generated charts can be used in a variety of ways in all disciplines, to cover a vast array of topics. Closely related is the Categorizing Grid. Charts can be created using various software programs and attached to assignment documents for the instructor, for the class, or in small groups; both as standalone documents or as supportive materials to a presentation or paper.
- **Chalkboards/Whiteboards:** Teachers or students use these to outline, summarize, and highlight concepts and information. Online these can be created in PowerPoint or other graphics programs and attached as files to assignment documents. There are also tools that can be used synchronously online specifically for this purpose that may feature capture and playback options.
- **Class-created annotated bibliography:** Students can be directed to regularly contribute to a class library of resources/references. As a directed learning activity the instructor can evaluate the student on the quantity of submissions, and require number of contributions, and that the student include a summary of the resource, as well as an evaluation of the resource (e.g., <https://groups.diigo.com/group/ETAP687>)
- **Survey:** The teacher or students devise a survey instrument to use in or outside class. One example of a teacher-created survey is the attitude survey of students that provides valuable information on student perceptions of their online course experience, or as a mechanism to poll students on a particular course-related topic. Students can also work in small groups to design instruments that they then implement offline and report on to the group or class.
- **Debate:** Informal debates encourage students to think critically about an issue or issues presented in class and allow for interactive class discussion. A debate is implemented by dividing students into two groups and assigning each a point of view to debate based on controversial material that had been presented in class. It is a pro-and-con discussion of a controversial issue. The objective is to convince the class (audience), rather than display skill in attacking the opponent. This can be done using the small group for preparation of the strategy of each side, and discussion areas for the actual presentation of the debate in the online course.
- **Demonstration:** Teacher or students demonstrate a concept, procedure, or technique. This can be an online or offline activity. Online, it might be presented as a discussion with supporting documents or graphics. Offline, demonstrations might be video or audio recorded to be turned in to

the instructor, with a section in the online course for reflections on the process. Or, a video or audio file sent to the students by the instructor, with a section in the online course for reflections on the process.

- **Discussion:** Lively online discussion fosters democratic participation and enhances learning. It emphasizes participation, dialogue, and two-way communication. The discussion method is one in which the instructor and a group of students consider a topic, issue, theory, or problem and exchange information, experiences, ideas, opinions, reactions, and conclusions with one another. Teaching by online discussion can be an extremely effective means of helping students apply abstract ideas and think critically about what they are learning and how to use and evaluate online and other resources to support their positions. Variation: student-led online discussions. Online discussion questions that are open ended and provocative work best. Instructors need to make sure students understand what is expected and how they will be evaluated. Students must be clear on how to take a position and support it. See related, *Questions and Answers*.
- **Field Trips:** This strategy increases motivation and highlights the application of classroom material to the real world. Field trips are an excellent opportunity to facilitate learning outside of the online classroom in an interesting and purposeful way. Field notes, reports, inventories, and treasure hunt lists can be developed in the online course individually or in small groups and then used in the field trip. Students can then return to the course to report on their experiences to the class or in small groups. Variation: Students can also videotape the field trip and turn it into the instructor. See related, *Direct an Observation*.
- **Film/Video/Audio:** As an offline activity for an online course, these tools help build background for particular topics or motivate student reaction and analysis. They encourage the use and development of communication skills and can be used to establish a social context for English as a Second Language, or to provide visual "texts" for deaf students. Film/Video/Audio etc. can be developed by the instructor and sent out to students, or in some cases, students can be directed to find a particular resource at the local library or video rental kiosk.
- **Group activity:** There is a nearly endless list of group and collaborative activities you can do in the online classroom. The group discussion, for example, provides an opportunity for pooling of ideas, experience, and knowledge.
- **Journal:** Journal entries provide students with opportunities to make observations and to reflect on their learning or skill development. Journals can be saved privately by the student and then turned in to the instructor or submitted to the instructor at regular intervals. Journaling activities can also be done in pairs or small groups with intervals for peer review. Variation – Keep a blog.
- **Games:** Games can be used to teach everything from art to zoology and are only limited by the imagination. Online or offline games can be used. Students can work individually or in small groups.
- **Laboratory:** In a laboratory, students apply what they have learned. Labs can be set up as online experiments using simulation web sites, or software, or off line as actual experiments that the students conduct and then return to the class to report their findings. Lab packets can be sent to

students including anything from seeds to sprout to a dead cat for dissection... Set up for this activity is rigorous and essential. (Individual, group?)

- **Learning Teams:** This group method encourages full participation from students in the learning process, provides shared support among students, and promotes individual preparation prior to class. This can be accomplished online using the small group areas. Variation see, *Study Groups*.
- **Graphic Organizers:** Concept maps, diagrams, maps are used to explain concepts. They can be student- or teacher-generated. They can be created in spreadsheets or other graphics software programs and attached as files to assignment documents or imported into the course for display.
- **Memorization:** There are a variety of memory techniques that students can devise, learn about, and practice as online and off line activities. In an online course that requires memorization, the self-test is a useful study tool to help students self-assess.
- **Models:** Teaching and learning models add dimension to the learning environment even when they are abstract. In an online classroom, models can be used as examples to clarify what is expected from the student in terms of behavior, responses, quality of work, etc.
- **News Articles:** Topical news stories are a great source of teaching material. They can raise students' level of involvement and participation in the lesson. In an online class, topical news stories can be used to bring in current events or to target learning to the individual interests of students. To do this in an online course where everything must be created prior to the first day of class, the structure of the course is designed in advance to explain and accommodate timely topical news, e.g., placeholder documents are created in the course in a Module called "the news room" where topical news-based activities will appear as they occur. Variation: Students pick a news story, item, trend, issue and follow it and post assignments related to their topic designed build expertise in the student on that topic, e.g., student becomes an expert related to the economics of South Africa, by reviewing an assigned list of periodicals for a certain period of time and completing a series of assignments designed to probe the topic, leading a small group discussion, and writing a paper to synthesize a report on the topic.
- **Object/Object Lessons:** Activities specifically developed to target specific concepts serve as object lessons that can enhance online discussions.
- **Panels:** An online discussion among a selected group of students with an assigned leader, in front of the class that joins in later. It is used as a technique to stimulate interest and thinking, and to provoke better discussion. With set up and explanation this can be done online using online discussion. Students are broken into Groups/Panels, given a topic, and a leader is assigned. The discussion in each group is restricted to group members but members from other groups are assigned to pick other panels to follow and then at a specific time are invited to pose questions to the panel and participate in the discussion.
- **Paradox:** Paradoxes help students move beyond either/or toward both/and thinking. A paradox presented online to a student, a small group, or to the class can be a very effective discussion starter, written assignment or small group activity to problem solve. See related, *Puzzles*.

- **Peer Review:** Student peer review is often used to increase the amount of feedback students receive on their writing and speaking assignments, but it can be applied to a variety of activities. You aren't asked to review, rank, or evaluate your peers, but provide formative information, to help a person improve, change, and grow as a writer. Online this can be done in assigned pairs or in small groups. Variation: Peer observations are different from the peer review.
- **Picture Studies:** Use of pictures & diagrams in the classroom. Graphics files can be imported or attached to documents in an online course by the instructor or the student to illustrate, support, document, or demonstrate.
- **Problem Solving:** Online, students solve given or self-generated problems individually or in groups.
- **Projects:** These can be done individually, in pairs or groups, student- or teacher designed. They can be online or offline activities. They can be posted online, to the instructor, to the class, to a small group, for evaluation, review or discussion. Or, they can be sent in to the instructor for evaluation, e.g., a sculpture, a video demonstrating a skill, or a recording of a conversation in a foreign language, etc.
- **Puzzles:** Puzzles cover all disciplines and may be verbal (written), mathematical, conceptual or concrete. A puzzle presented online to a student, a small group, or to the class can be a very effective discussion starter, written assignment, or small group activity to problem solve. See related, *Paradox*.
- **Quiz or self-test:** Questions may be short essay, multipart, matching, multiple-choice, short answer, true/false, etc.
- **Questions and Answers:** A variation on the ancient Socratic method. This as an online activity can be done with the entire class or in pairs or groups. Student and teacher may reverse roles. See related, *Discussion*.
- **Report:** An online report may occur in a variety of formats and may be delivered individually or as a group effort, to the entire class or to small groups, or to the instructor. The instructor must set up the location in the course for reports and clearly document, how, when, and where reports are expected.
- **Review:** An online review may have various resources as its object such as a book, article, a performance, etc. Variation: Students can peer review each other's work.
- **Role Playing:** The spontaneous acting out of a situation or an incident by selected members of the group. It may be used as the basis of developing clearer insights into the feelings of people and the forces in a situation that facilitate, or block good human relations. Online a role-play has documented and assigned roles, scenarios that set up the situation or incident and can be carried out in small groups. The instructor must provide very clear definition of roles, role assignment,

activity set up, explanations, etc. A role-play must be carefully planned and executed in an online course for it to work. See related, *Simulation*.

- **Skits:** Skit writing can easily be incorporated into an online classroom including science and math to make concepts and ideas come alive. A skit can also be carried out in an online classroom as an offline activity that is videotaped and turned into the instructor for review and evaluation. A report /description of the skit can be submitted by the student online to the class to incorporate it as part of the online course.
- **Simulations:** (1) Provide a way of creating a rich communicative environment (a representation of reality) where students actively become a part of some real-world system and function according to predetermined roles as members of that group. Some examples include the Analytic Memo, In Basket (Manager's Box); Committee Hearing; management lab (corporate business); treasure hunt; web quest; Sam's Café (philosophical perspectives); Point Counter Point; U.N Council Meeting; Let's Do Business!, etc. Rigorous set up for this type of activity is required on the part of the instructor. Definition of roles, role assignment, and activity set up, explanations, etc., must be carefully planned and executed in an online course for this to work. See related, *Role Play*. (2) Multimedia simulations can be added to an online course to illustrate, explain, deconstruct a process, function, system, etc. Simulations can be distributed to students on CDs as accompanying materials to the course, added as objects or links to a course as presentation material, be incorporated into a course as a component of test or quiz, etc.
- **Storytelling:** This is a powerful teaching strategy that can be used online not only in English, but also in history and any disciplines with an historical background, which includes all.
- **Study Groups:** Students can be assigned to pairs or small groups to help each other out in the course for the entire duration of the course, or to rotate with time or change in topic. Variation see, *Learning Teams*.
- **Symposium:** An ancient Greek instructional technique. It is a discussion in which the topic is broken into its various phases; each part is presented by an expert or person well informed on that particular phase, in a brief, concise speech. Online, students can perfect their phase individually or in small groups with discussion and assignments designed by the instructor or the students to perfect their brief concise "speech," and then be directed to present it to the entire class.
- **Poll:** This is a quick technique that can be used to take the pulse of the class, highlight differences of opinion or interpretation, and surface assumptions. Instructors can use the test/self-test or multipart written assignment forms to create their online polls.
- **Testimonies:** Personal testimonies bring life to any learning environment. Online self-disclosure can be easier for some with an aspect or illusion of anonymity because of the lack of face-to-face presence. Ground rules need to be set up to establish expectations for confidentiality, online courteous behavior, and respect for each other.

Researched by J. Prusch, and written and adapted by A.M. Pickett.

## **Enhance Your Online Discussion/Interactions**

An online discussion will take at least 2 weeks to fully develop. Also, keep in mind that students are told “any time, any place” and many working students log on only on weekends.

A full discussion will require at least:

1. An initial response.
2. A response to someone else's response.
3. And then response to any response to their original response.

It is very important that you begin the first discussion activity in your course with a document that gives instructions and explains your expectations for discussion in your course. Include the number of responses required, any other specific requirements or expectations you may have for the activity (such as a time frame for the discussion), how you plan to evaluate discussion, what percentage of the grade their interaction in the course will be, and what constitutes an acceptable response.

Keep in mind that online "Discussion" or interaction is not the same as traditional "class participation." Asynchronous interaction between students and with the instructor is a complex instructional interactive process that requires thought, synthesis, analysis, substantiation, critical thinking, etc. In this environment for most courses, discussion is a primary teaching and learning tool. It must be valued accordingly.

### **Best Practices in Online Interaction:**

- Make sure your discussion/interaction is long enough. Remember that discussions usually take at least 2 weeks to fully develop.
- Require participation: specify quantity and quality of participation. The clearer you are, the better. Consider providing students with a model response; specify the criteria students should use to support their opinions and responses.
- Grade participation: Be sure students are clear about the quantity and quality of participation required. Be sure to give students clear instructions on timeliness of their participation in the activity.
- Give students private feedback on their participation in your course discussion. It is important to evaluate the quality of the contributions in your course discussion and give periodic individual feedback on how they are doing in this type interaction.
- Create and provide documents in your course that specify what is due when. Module overviews, timeframes, and agendas help students keep on task and working on activities as a group and ensure that participation in your activities happens smoothly.
- If you have more than one discussion item in a module, indicate the start and end dates in the document title so students will know which discussions are active and the time frame for the discussion.

- Resist the temptation to respond to every student's response. Otherwise, the discussion may become a series of dialogs between you and each student, rather than among the students.
- However, don't be absent from the discussion. The students need to know you are there.
- Resist the temptation to be "didactic" in your own responses. Instead of supplying the answer, guide the discussion so that the students "discuss" the answers on their own.
- Encourage students to use the subject field to describe their input. The subject should add to the context of the discussion, not, for example, "DISCUSSION ITEM 1." Descriptive subjects add to the structure and understanding of the discussion.
- Don't ask questions that are not interesting, or that will not result in "discussion." Use open-ended questions. Your discussion starter should pose a question that requires comprehension, or synthesis of the readings / course materials, or be provocative in some way, not, for example, "List the 5 major points of ... "
- Structure the discussion/interaction. Topics should not be too open-ended or students may lose focus. One way to structure discussion is through debates. Assigning or asking students to choose a position in advance can be helpful. Other structuring devices include problem solving, case studies, interviews, panels, brainstorming, summaries, etc.
- Be explicit in your expectations for participation and types of acceptable responses. You may consider giving students a model of what will *not* suffice, e.g., "yup, I agree."
- Know the difference between setting up an online discussion and asking students to write a short essay response to a question.
- Require a product that is based on, or the result of discussion: A "hand-in" assignment that is based on class discussion can help students to synthesize, integrate and apply what has been discussed.
- Include ideas and information generated in discussion/interaction on exams. Such inclusion serves to reinforce the importance of student collaboration and makes "cheating" much more difficult. If students need to participate in class discussions to answer exam questions, they will be unable to simply "copy" from outside sources.
- Form Small Groups or Learning Teams. Assigning students to these (rather than allowing self-selection) can help avoid logistical problems that inhibit productivity. If you do allow self-selection, establish a deadline for this process (a week to ten days) and then default to teacher assignment to the groups after the deadline. Small groups can
 

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Come to a consensus</li> <li>– Develop group presentations</li> <li>– Subject each other's work to peer review</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prepare for exams</li> <li>– Analyze a case study, etc.</li> <li>– Small groups are especially helpful for large classes</li> </ul> |
|--|--|
- Create a discussion response that calls on specific students that have not yet participated in the discussion.

- Create a discussion response that asks a specific student to clarify a point, or that asks a student to reassess a response in light of another student's response.
- Don't hesitate to call on individual students in the discussion to clarify a point, or to further substantiate their position. Assign individual students the task of summarizing the discussion.
- Don't hesitate to call on a student by name to ask a question. You can use this method to encourage discussion among students. For example, ask what one student thinks of another's response in light of his/her own position.
- Create a discussion response that asks a follow-up question of the group or of an individual student.
- The quickest way for you to grind a discussion to a halt is to step in and summarize or synthesize the discussion. Students will assume that since you are the instructor, a summary caps the discussion. To keep the discussion going, draw attention to points that come up, refer to students' responses by name, etc., and post more questions that will encourage the students to take the discussion further. You can also call on a student by name to clarify, or probe a point.
- Employ a student-led discussion strategy where assigned students come up with critical thinking questions and are evaluated on the quality of their questions and how they facilitate the discussion. In a discussion intensive course, this strategy will help the instructor with workload.
- Establish boundaries or rules for interaction in your course. Include a document on netiquette appropriate for your course in your course information documents. Set clear rules and expectations regarding acceptable behavior for your course..
- Be encouraging, supportive, timely, and constructive in all discussions and all evaluations of the products of discussions/interactions. Promote quality participation by publicly acknowledging it and by modeling it.

## **How do I assess students' interaction in my course?**

### **Evaluating Interaction**

As mentioned, online "Discussion" or interaction is not the same as traditional "class participation." Asynchronous interaction between students and with the instructor is a complex instructional interactive process that requires thought, synthesis, analysis, substantiation, critical thinking, etc. In this environment for most courses, it is a primary teaching and learning tool. It must be valued accordingly.

### **What criteria should I use to rate student responses and interaction in my course?**

Students must demonstrate knowledge of the material - not just opinions. Each contribution made to any of the discussion or interaction thread should add something of value to the class.

1. In designing effective discussion starters, questions should be thoughtfully developed and carefully worded. Questions posed to address issues and/or concepts from the reading that are particularly important.

Consider using these criteria for evaluating student-led discussion interaction (where students are responsible for leading the online discussion):

- Relevance - question must be relevant to the material in the unit of study.
- Importance - question must address a significant issue in the unit of study.
- Thought-provoking - question must require high-level thought, not a simple "look-up" in the textbook.
- Originality - does not ask a question that is essentially the same as a question posed by another student.
- Timely - question must be posted early in the Module so that the other students have an opportunity to respond.

2. Consider using these criteria for evaluating student interaction Responses to questions:

- Is the answer correct?
- Is the answer thorough?
- Is the answer focused and to the point?
- Is the answer well organized?
- Is the answer well written? Is the answer original?

3. Three things determine the quality of a discussion thread:

- The quality of the initial discussion question asked.
- The quality of the response posts.
- The depth of the discussion thread. Discussion "depth" is determined by how many indents there are.

Use this to help guide the creation of the criteria for rating student interaction in your course. Once you have your stated criteria, you can build an evaluation rubric for interaction in your course.

## Rubrics

### How do we determine the value of a response in an online course?

It is necessary to use a Discussion Rubric that spells out the criteria for student responses, so students know what is expected of them and how their performance will be evaluated. Rubrics are authentic learner-centered assessment tools that are designed using criteria that are performance based.

Advantages of using rubrics:

- Assessments are more objective and consistent.
- Clarifies the instructor's criteria in specific terms.
- Shows students what is expected and how their work will be evaluated.
- Increases awareness in assessing peer performance.
- Provides feedback.
- Provides benchmarks.

A good rubric....

- Measures a stated objective.
- Uses a range to rate performance.
- Has specific performance characteristics that are arranged in levels indicating the degree to which the standard has been met.

### Create a Rubric

Evaluating interaction in an online course is a challenge to online instructors. How do you evaluate online interaction both quantitatively, and more importantly "qualitatively?" Recent research in the field of online learning suggests that online discussion/interaction responses that add value to a discussion fall into one or more of three categories: Social Presence, Cognitive Presence, or Teaching Presence. Based on (Garrison D. R., 2001)

It makes sense then to create a very clear and specific rubric for your students so they understand how their interaction in your course will be evaluated. (*See Appendix B.*)

Consider the following criteria when creating a rubric for discussion/interaction responses for your online course:

- Social Presence - to what extent does a response contribute to the class community as a whole?
- Cognitive Presence - is the information accurate? Is it backed up by citations and references to reputable scholarly work? Does it raise any provocative, tangential issues?
- Teaching Presence - to what extent does a response teach others? Does it offer any information that students have not yet seen/learned?

## Direct Instruction

### Confirming understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback

Think about how you will assess learning activities and provide feedback. Review the list of learning activities that you created and take a moment to think about how you plan to provide feedback, assess or evaluate student work, performance, or learning for each activity.

Look at the Evaluation document you created in your Course Information documents area. Have you assigned appropriate values to the types of activities in your course? Do they match the actual activities you have planned? For example, is discussion 60% of the course and only 25% of the grade?

How will you evaluate discussion, if it is a component of your course?

- How you evaluate student work depends on what it is you have asked students to do - *that you will then evaluate...*
- To evaluate if students understand a concept, have them define it, find examples of it, apply it.
- To evaluate if students understand a process have them demonstrate it.
- Devise activities that force students to analyze, evaluate, synthesize and apply the information, knowledge, concept or process. Have them make their thinking visible.

Review the workload for students and for yourself. How many students are you likely to have? What if you have a very small number of enrollments? What if you have a very large number of enrollments? Will the activities you are planning still work? What alternatives do you have?

Give some thought to your workload and course management. You should begin to gauge what it is going to take to participate in and manage your course and to evaluate your students' work, and your students will need to know how you will be evaluating them on these activities and when they can expect feedback and evaluations from you and what form they will take. The more your students know about the tasks, activities, expectations, requirements and how they will be evaluated, the more comfortable and confident they will be participating in the course.

Your online **course development tool** will have various ways to provide feedback to your students, groups, and class, and will have evaluation mechanisms for you to use to provide and display grades to your students. In addition, plan to provide regular progress reports for each student to give them feedback on how they are progressing in the course and what they can do to improve.

## Peer-to-peer feedback

- Create opportunities for students to help students.
- Create small groups/study groups.
- Create collaborative learning activities and assignments.
- Create activities that require peer reviews/feedback.
- Set the expectation that students may help each other out in the course with questions, etc.

## Create opportunities to collect student feedback

- Create a course review activity or assignment - or use the built-in culminating activity.
- Create a Suggestion Box for students to give you suggestions and feedback on how to improve the course.

- Give bonus points to students who find small errors or inconsistencies in your course.
- Give bonus points to students whose feedback actually results in a change that you implement in your course.

### Keep/Use:

A **private notebook** for comments, evaluation criteria, revisions to tests/assessments  
Private folders for feedback, private tutoring, etc.

### Self-tests for student self-assessment.

Self-assessment activities are also very effective activities online that will help to confirm understanding. Many textbooks come with CDs that have self -assessments that could be incorporated, or companion web sites. Some of these websites are very sophisticated, and may even email you the results of your students' tests that they have available on their closed site for that purpose. To evaluate if students have completed and understood the readings in the textbook, create a self-test for them to check their comprehension and guide their progress.

**Peer evaluation** has many benefits. It increases autonomy; it can deepen understanding and reinforce the application of standards or criteria in students, moves students from being passive to active learners. Work as an active peer evaluator supports a student's capacity to reflect, and make judgments. Peer evaluation can be designed to assist the instructor in providing timely student feedback.

**Tests, midterms, and finals** provide students with feedback and course progress assessments and may identify where they need to concentrate their efforts to improve.

The use of **discussion ratings** may help you qualitatively evaluate discussion and interaction in your course. Consider rating discussion responses in conjunction with a rubric and provide feedback/evaluations to students on their performance.

### Rubrics

1. Provide rubrics for grading and assessment of all learning activities and assignments.
2. Provide rubrics that detail how discussion will be evaluated qualitatively.
3. Provide rubrics for overall achievement.

**Use the Assignment Evaluation mechanisms** provided by your **course development tool** to provide corrective feedback and comments to your students on their work and progress/performance in your course. Use a different color to mark up student assignments, or use other built-in mechanisms in the evaluation forms built in to your **course development tool** to provide general and corrective feedback to your online students, and create by-module evaluations/progress reports so students know how they are doing and how they can improve.

**Implement a Course Evaluation.** At mid-semester or as a culminating activity in your course you can learn a lot by asking students to tell you what worked well in the course and what they think needs to be improved. This course evaluation is something just between you and the students to help inform your own evaluation and review of and revisions to your online course; it should be in addition to and not take the place of a formal institutional course or faculty evaluation.

Provide prompt and clear feedback for students:

- Provide comments/guidance/feedback in the public community areas of the course: Ask a Question Areas, the Bulletin Board, the Announcements, etc.
- Provide timely feedback.
- Provide private feedback.
- Timing of corrective feedback.
- Provide comments/guidance/feedback in responses and comments in discussions.
- Provide models to demonstrate and clarify expectations.
- Audio files to provide feedback.
- Using the subject line to provide corrective feedback.

## Suggested Online Assessment Techniques (OATs)

### Minute paper

During the last few days of an open module, ask students: “What is the most important point you learned in this module?” and “What point remains least clear to you?” The purpose is to elicit data about students’ comprehension of a particular module/topic.

Review responses and note any useful comments. In a follow-up discussion emphasize the issues illuminated by the students’ comments.

### Quick Check-in

Instructor creates a discussion with one question about the course/module/topic, and gives a very short time frame for responses, etc. Each student responds to the question in the allotted time. Responses may be posted publicly in a discussion, or posted in each of the student’s private folders, or as a written assignment with instructions to submit to class or professor.

#### *What to do with it:*

Go through the student responses and determine the best criteria for categorizing the data with the goal of detecting response patterns. Discussing the patterns of responses with students can lead to improved teaching and learning.

### Memory matrix

Instructor creates an assignment: Attaches a Word table representing a two-dimensional diagram for which instructor has provided labels. Students fill in cells and return their Word documents as attachments to assignments. For example, in a music course, labels might consist of periods (Baroque, Classical) by countries (Germany, France, Britain); students enter composers in cells to demonstrate their ability to remember and classify key concepts.

#### *What to do with it:*

Tally the numbers of correct and incorrect responses in each cell. Analyze differences both between and among the cells. Look for patterns among the incorrect responses and decide what might be the cause(s).

### Directed paraphrasing

Ask students to submit a layman's “translation” of something they have just learned—geared to a specified individual or audience—to assess their ability to comprehend and transfer concepts.

#### *What to do with it:*

Categorize student responses according to characteristics you feel are important. Analyze the responses both within and across categories, noting ways you could address student needs.

### One-sentence summary

Students summarize knowledge of a topic by constructing and submitting online a single sentence that answers the questions “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” The purpose is to require students to select only the defining features of an idea.

#### *What to do with it:*

Evaluate the quality of each summary quickly and holistically. Note whether students have identified the essential concepts of the class topic and their interrelationships. Share your observations with your students in a follow-up discussion to the activity.

## Exam Evaluations

Select a type of test that you are likely to give more than once or that has a significant impact on student performance. Create a few questions that evaluate the quality of the test. Add these questions to the exam or administer a separate, follow-up evaluation.

### *What to do with it:*

Distinguish student comments that address the fairness of your grading from those that address the fairness of the test as an assessment instrument. Respond to the general ideas represented by student comments.

## Real-World Application

After teaching about an important theory, principle, or procedure, ask students to submit at least one real-world application for what they have just learned to determine how well they can transfer their learning.

### *What to do with it:*

Quickly read once through the applications and categorize them according to their quality. Pick out a broad range of examples and present them to the class in a follow-up discussion.

## Student-generated test questions

Allow students to write test questions and model answers for specified topics, in a format consistent with course exams. This will give students the opportunity to evaluate the course topics, reflect on what they understand, and what good test items are.

### *What to do with it:*

Make a rough tally of the questions your students propose and the topics that they cover. Evaluate the questions and select appropriate questions as prompts for discussion. You may also want to revise the questions and use them on an upcoming exam.

Adapted from (Angelo, 1993) (Davis, 1993)

## Online Activities

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### Online Course Activities

#### Continue to:

- Participate as a student in the online asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own online course.
- Reflect on who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be (perceived?) as an online educator.
- Consider who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, teaching and learning online in general, and the online course design/development process.
- Observe some exemplar online courses to see how the instructors structured their courses, to see what learning activities the instructors designed in their courses, how they designed them, and how they evaluated their students' work and performance in the course.
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.
- Explore the internet for resources to enhance and support your learning activities and the design of your course. For example:
  - Check with your textbook publisher to see what companion online activities and resources they may offer.
  - Go to <http://www.merlot.org>. Become a member and browse the resources in your discipline to see if there are any learning objects or resources that you might use to supplement or enhance your course learning activities.
  - For information and help creating rubrics for your online course.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Create the Learning Activities for each of your course modules using your **course development tool**.
- Design and organize the structure of the learning activities for your course.
- Determine how you will facilitate discourse and interaction in your course.
- Decide how you will confirm understanding, provide feedback and evaluate your students' work and performance in your course.
- Design rubrics to evaluate interaction in your online course.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

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In the fourth step you:

- Reviewed best practices and used/adapted them to create your Online Course Learning Activity documents in your **course development tool**.
- Learned to edit and revise the documents in your **course development tool**.
- Became familiar with your online course interface.
- Explored online resources to enhance your course and learning activities.
- Incorporated best practices to enhance the sense of class community in your online course.
- Incorporated best practices to enhance online “Teaching Presence” in your course and used the three indicators of Teaching Presence to inform the design choices.
- Incorporated best practices to enhance online “Teaching Presence” in your course and used the three indicators of Teaching Presence to inform decisions in the design of your online learning activities and how you will assess and evaluate learning in your online course.

*You are now ready to move on to the next Step: 5. Refine!*

## Step 5: Refine

### Overview, Purpose, and Objectives

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#### Overview

This step is about reviewing, getting feedback, and making the final revisions to your course. In addition to doing your own walk-through, use the checklists provided to review, revise, and finalize your course.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this Step in your Online Course Design Process is to finalize the design of your online course.

#### Objectives

In this step you will:

- Use checklists to review and revise your online course modules.
- “Preflight” your online course as a whole by targeting three levels of review/revisions:
- Student perspective
- Structural (instructional design) elements of your course
- Mechanics of your course.
- Make refinements and finalize your course design.

## Background

### Getting outside feedback and making revisions

This step is about reviewing, getting feedback, and making the final revisions to your course. In addition to doing your own walk-through, use the checklists provided to review, revise, and finalize your course. Having someone with a fresh perspective review your course is an excellent way to refine your materials. You may also want to get a colleague or test student to review your course from the web and give you additional feedback. You should ask for feedback on structure, sequence, pacing, amount of work required, presentation, instructions, and design of learning activities in the online environment. Based on your own review and any other feedback you receive, you will make the final revisions to your course.

### Editing, evaluation, and revision during the development phase of your course

An integral part of the design stage of your course development process is the evaluation and revision of your course modules. If possible, and as time permits, you may want to have an outside reviewer such as a colleague or expert in the field, and/or an instructional designer, review your course. They can give you very valuable feedback about issues such as content accuracy, technical quality and functionality, user acceptability and usability, and issues associated with actually implementing and using the instruction.

Whether you use a reviewer or not, it is important for you to evaluate and revise or refine the structure, materials, and activities you are designing during the development phase of your course. The checklists in this handbook have been designed to help you evaluate, review, and pinpoint areas in your course in need of revision or further development. Any reviews you do of your course should be done from the web. Review the instructions in Step 4 on how to preview your course from the web. On the pages that follow, you will find some checklists to help you or your external reviewers with your formative evaluations.

**IMPORTANT:** One of the main differences between teaching online and teaching in a traditional classroom is that online instruction is essentially text-based. All of your course content, instructional materials, and learning activities (for both online and non-online activities) must be completely planned, designed, and laid out prior to the first day of class. Though this may make you feel initially constrained, paradoxically this will give you freedom and flexibility when you move to the delivery phase of teaching and managing your course. For example, if your course material requires flexibility, as in a Current Events course, you must plan for it and build it into the design of the course to make sure that the technology will function as planned and to have a consistent and well organized environment for your students so that they feel comfortable, and well oriented to your course, the structure of the material presented, the scope of the course, the tasks and assignments involved, the environment, etc. Concurrent development and delivery of course sections is not advised.

Note that during the design and development phases of your course, you can always edit, add to, restructure, redesign and change things. However, once you move to the delivery phase, any changes you make should be minor content changes. Do not attempt to redesign or make major design changes to the structure and function of your course as you are teaching it.

## Readings and Resources

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### Readings:

- *Step 5* in the course manual.

### Videos:

- [\*How do you engage online learners?\*](#) - a YouTube playlist of experienced educators in online learning..

### Best Practices Checklist:

- Best Practices Checklists

### Additional Resources:

- [Online Community of Inquiry Review: Social, Cognitive, and Teaching Presence Issues](#), D.R. Garrison.

## Checklist: Do a Module Walk-Through

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You can use this checklist formatively, that is, as a guide during the development of your modules. The items on this checklist represent best practices that can help you define and refine the elements of your online course and learning activities. As you complete the modules in your course, use this checklist to review and then revise each module of your course. To use the checklist, read through a module from the beginning and imagine that you are a student who is seeing the materials for the first time. (You can also give this checklist to an external reviewer to review your modules.) To check your course **from the perspective of a student**, be sure to use **student-level access** to view the module.

## Module Walk-Through Checklist

---

### Check the following:

---

#### Information

##### YES NO

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | From the module overview the kinds of activities that need to be completed are clear. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know what to do first.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know how long I have to complete all the activities and assignments in the module.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know when my assignments are due.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are clear instructions for every activity.                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | It is clear to me how my work on assignments will be evaluated.                       |

#### Organization

##### YES NO

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Course materials are logically (and sequentially) organized.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is a consistent structure applied to course modules, sections, and documents.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The sequence of documents within each module is logical and clear.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Module titles are meaningful and engaging.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Module and page titles convey information <b>about</b> the activity or content, and function as advanced organizers for the course. |

#### Presentation

##### YES NO

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Course pages and documents are easy to read in form or content.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Course content is presented in an effective and engaging manner.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Graphics and multimedia are used to optimally and efficiently convey, explain, support, and enhance specific instructional points. |

Tone

YES NO

☐ ☐

The tone of the course is inviting and engaging.

☐ ☐

The instructor speaks in the first person (I) and addresses me directly, in the second person (you).

☐ ☐

I have the sense that I am in a class community.

☐ ☐

The instructor seems accessible and interested.

*Complete or revise your course to address the list items checked "NO."*

## Checklist: Finalize your Modules

The items on this checklist represent best practices that can help you define and refine the elements of your online course and learning activities. Use this checklist to finalize each of your modules. Once you have revised a module using the Module Walk-through Checklist, use this checklist as your final step.

### Module Finalization Checklist

#### Check the following:

##### Accuracy

###### YES NO

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The instructor seems accessible and interested.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I proofread each document in the module.                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The instructor seems accessible and interested.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I spell-checked each course page, document, and attachment. |

##### Consistency

###### YES NO

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course module titles convey their instructional context in a clear, simple, engaging, meaningful, and logical manner.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Organizational elements such as headings, subheadings, titles, and section titles are used to contribute to the organizational framework of the module in an instructionally meaningful way. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Document titles are leveraged to convey contents in an instructionally meaningful way.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I maintained a consistent first person voice throughout the course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I addressed students in the second person consistently throughout the course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I used fonts, font sizes, and text color consistently throughout the course  |

##### Page Layout

###### YES NO

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I broke up and organized long documents to improve readability online.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I eliminated/consolidated documents that were too short, redundant, or extraneous. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I used headlines and sub-heads to improve clarity and readability of text.         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I used color and graphics/multimedia purposefully.                                 |

##### Functionality

###### YES NO

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I provided clear and complete instructions for students.                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I clearly set up the expectations for participation for each type of course learning activity. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All pages, documents, attachments, forms, links, and buttons function as intended.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tested each link and URL and they all function as intended.                                  |

***Complete or revise your course to address the list items checked "NO."***

## Checklist: Walk through your online course as a student and revise

---

The items on this checklist represent best practices that can help you define and refine the elements of your online course and learning activities. Put yourself in the student's place and read each document in your course from that perspective. Start at the beginning and work your way sequentially through your course the way a student would. Remember to assume the role and perspective of the student and make note of any changes you would like to make. To check your course **from the perspective of a student** be sure to use **student-level access** to view the module.

### Student-level Walk-Through Checklist

---

#### Check the following:

---

##### General:

YES NO

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I can tell what the course is and who the instructor is from the course home page.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know specifically where to begin and what to do first in the course from the course home page.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course provides course information documents that are easy to find when I enter the course for the first time and that provide course orientation and syllabus information, i.e., Welcome, Contact Information, How You Will Be Evaluated, My Expectations, Course Schedule, Your Next Steps. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I was welcomed to the course by the instructor.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I was provided with a course schedule of time frames and dates, and assignment due dates are clear and reasonable.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course provides a class community area.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course begins with an engaging ice-breaking activity to start the course.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know specifically what is expected of me in this course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know specifically what I can expect from my instructor in this course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course provides clear and measurable course learning objectives.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The course provides an overview of each module.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am clear about how my work will be evaluated.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know how to contact my instructor.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know how to ask a question and/or get help.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know how to report a bug or a technical problem with the course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have the opportunity to interact, collaborate, and/or reflect on my learning in this course.  |

For each assignment or learning activity:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ It is clear when each assignment is due.
- ☐ ☐ It is clear exactly what I should do or produce.
- ☐ ☐ It is clear how to complete and where to submit assignments.
- ☐ ☐ It is clear whether the completed assignment will be public or private.
- ☐ ☐ It is clear when and how the assignment will be evaluated, and when I can expect feedback.
- ☐ ☐ There are clear instructions on each document so that I know what to do, where to go, or what I should do next, or prior to each learning activity.
- ☐ ☐ There notes of encouragement or milestones written into the learning activity instructions when appropriate.

Discussions/Interactions:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ The initial discussion/interaction document adequately sets up the topic and expectations for the interaction.
- ☐ ☐ The time frame and expectations for the discussion/interaction activity are clearly communicated.
- ☐ ☐ The length and nature of the responses are clearly communicated.
- ☐ ☐ The instructions state whether I should initiate a new discussion/interaction, lead the discussion/interaction, or respond to the provided main topic, responses, or both.
- ☐ ☐ I know how my participation in the discussion/interaction will be evaluated.

Wrap up:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ I know how, where, and when I will receive my grades.
- ☐ ☐ The course provides activities to bring closure to the course.
- ☐ ☐ I have a way to provide feedback to the instructor on my experience in the course, the design of the course, etc.

***Complete or revise your course to address the list items checked "NO."***

## Checklist: Peer Review Your Online Course

---

Below is a checklist that can be used by an external or peer reviewer to finalize the course before it goes live. Or, you can use this yourself to check your course **from the perspective of a student**.

Be sure to use **student-level access** to be sure you see it from the perspective of the student.

### Peer Reviewer Checklist

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#### Check the following:

---

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ The instructor's name, course title, and institution are prominently visible and correctly spelled on course home page.

#### Read and Proof Course Information Area and Documents.

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ These documents exist, are well explained, clearly visible, and free of errors: Welcome, Contact Information, How You Will Be Evaluated, My Expectations, Course Schedule, and Your Next Steps.
- ☐ ☐ There are no assignments or discussions in the course information area. Assignments should be moved to the first course module. The course information area is to present information only.
- ☐ ☐ Every course learning activity addresses a stated course learning objective.
- ☐ ☐ Every learning objective has a corresponding learning activity.
- ☐ ☐ Every learning activity has a corresponding mechanism to provide student feedback, an assessment, or an evaluation.

#### Check "Other" Course Documents/Areas

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ The instructor has provided a personal profile.
- ☐ ☐ The profile includes a picture or avatar.
- ☐ ☐ The instructor has posted an introduction to the class bulletin board.
- ☐ ☐ The instructor has posted the first class announcement, and it is clear and free of errors.
- ☐ ☐ To provide models of exemplary work for assignments and interactions, examples are provided.
- ☐ ☐ Rubrics are used.
- ☐ ☐ There are no blank or incomplete documents posted (especially in the Course Information area and in modules 1-3)!

#### Verify the Views of the Course:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ Modules, activities, and course areas are labeled, numbered, or ordered correctly.
- ☐ ☐ Modules, documents, and course areas that should be visible to students as they enter the course are open.
- ☐ ☐ Automations to reveal or hide course sections and/or assignments are set to function correctly and at the intended and optimal dates and times.

#### Read through the first 3 Modules:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ There are no errors of spelling or formatting.
- ☐ ☐ All URLs and links function as intended.
- ☐ ☐ When any course page, activity, area or element is referred to, you can find it (e.g., the instructor refers to the exact subject of a document, or label on a link, or button).
- ☐ ☐ It is clear how to ask a question from any page in the course.

#### Proof Modules 1-3

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ Fonts used throughout the course are standard, consistent, and in readable point sizes for body text and headlines (recommended: 14/16 or 14/18 points).
- ☐ ☐ Bold or italic are used for emphasis rather than underline or color.
- ☐ ☐ Text colors are consistent, appropriate, and readable online.
- ☐ ☐ There are no spelling or formatting problems.

#### The First Course Module:

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ Contains an ice-breaking activity, for example, a self-test, or discussion, or assignment.  
NOTE: If course uses attachments, suggest that faculty have students test this out in a trial activity so they can work it out before the activity counts.
- ☐ ☐ Gives an overview of the course.
- ☐ ☐ Clearly tells students what to do/expect, step-by-step.

#### First Discussion/Interaction Assignment

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ The first discussion/interaction activity documents provide clear and accurate instructions for students: i.e., what to do, how to do it, when it is due, what its requirements are, and how it will be evaluated.
- ☐ ☐ The first discussion/interaction activities have the correct functionality for completing and

- ☐ ☐ submitting the assignments online, or there are instructions on how to submit the work.
- ☐ ☐ The first discussion/interaction assignment works as intended.
- ☐ ☐ The first group activities or collaborations (if any) are clearly explained.

#### First Written Assignment

YES NO

- ☐ ☐ The first written assignment activity documents specify instructions for students: what to do, how to do it, when it is due, what its requirements are, and how it will be evaluated.
- ☐ ☐ The first written assignment activity has the correct functionality for completing and submitting the assignment online, or there are instructions on how to submit the work.
- ☐ ☐ The first written assignment works as intended.

***Complete or revise your course to address the list items checked “NO.”***

## Online Activities

---

### Online Course Activities

Continue to:

- Participate as a student in the asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own online course.
- Reflect on your who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be perceived as an online educator.
- Consider who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, online teaching and learning in general, and on the online course design/development process.
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Review your course and make the necessary refinements to the structure, instructional documents, content, learning activities, etc.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

---

In the fifth step you:

- Used best practice checklists to review, revise, and finalize your online course.
- Had your course reviewed by a peer or an instructional designer.
- Became more familiar with your online course interface.

*You are now ready to move on to the next Step: 6. Implement!*

## Step 6: Implement

### Overview, Purpose, and Objectives

---

#### Overview:

This step marks the transition from the development phase of your course in your **course development tool** to the delivery phase.

#### Purpose:

The purposes of this step in the Online Course Design Process are to:

- Develop and practice course management skills.
- Plan for the first couple of weeks of your online course.

#### Objectives:

- Learn how to manage your course using the features of your **course development tool**.
- Prepare to teach your course.
- Practice the skills you will be using to teach and manage your online course.

## Background

### Getting ready to teach your course

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There are features in your **course development tool** designed for teaching and managing your course that you have not used during the development phase. They may include such features as:

- Ways to evaluate your students.
- Ways to evaluate and grade individual assignments.
- Ways to communicate privately and publicly with your students.
- Ways to make announcements.
- Ways to send group messages.
- Ways to see who has done what and how often.
- Ways to respond, manage, or participate in the various activities and interactions you design into your course, etc.

In this step we will review:

1. What you need to do before your course starts.
2. How to manage your course using your **course development tool**.
3. Teaching tips and troubleshooting suggestions.

## Readings and Resources

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### Readings

- *Steps 6 & 7* in the course manual.
- [\*Seven Principles of Effective Teaching - A Practical Lens for Evaluating Online Courses\*](#), Charles Graham, Karat Cagiltay, Byung-Ro Lim, Joni Craner, and Thomas M. Duffy , The Technology Source, March/April 2001.
- [\*Assessing Online Learning, Special Report\*](#), Faculty Focus, retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/wp-content/uploads/images/AssessingOnlineLearning-OC.pdf>

### Videos:

- [Facilitating Collaboration & Interaction](#) (Minilog playlist)
- [Online Feedback and Assessment](#) (Minilog playlist)
- [Strategies for Managing Online Workload](#) - a YouTube playlist of online teaching experts discussing different strategies to managing the online workload in an online environment.

### Podcasts:

- [Exemplar Online Instructor Interviews: Reflections](#)

### Course Review Checklist:

- Course Review Checklist

### Additional Resources:

- [\*Assessment and Online Teaching, Australian Flexible Learning Quick Guide Series\*](#)
- [\*Effective Assessment in a Digital Age: A guide to technology-enhanced assessment and feedback\*](#). Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 2.0 UK: England and Wales license. The copyright of this publication is held by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on behalf of JISC.© HEFCE, 2010.
- [Rubrics](#)
- 

### Course Culminating Activity

*A Vision of Students Today*, Michael Wesch, YouTube October 2007,  
<http://youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>

## Best Practices

### Things to think about when teaching in an online environment

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When teaching in an online environment there are several things you need to know. It's all in the planning.

- The answers to these questions will help you plan your course of action. How will you get help if you need it?
- What will you do if your hardware malfunctions?
- Do you have a back-up copy of your course?
- Will your course be backed up regularly during the delivery phase?
- What will you do if your software malfunctions?
- What will you do if the network is down?
- How will your students enroll and get course access?
- When will your course be available to your students?
- What are the start and end dates for your course?
- What is the census date for your course?
- What are your institutional or departmental policies regarding online courses?
- How will you respond to students that contact you with technology questions?
- How will students get help if they need it?
- What will you do about students that start late?
- Is cross-platform compatibility an issue for activities in your online course?
- How will you accommodate students with disabilities or special needs?
- How will you deal with students who do not complete the course within the allotted time frame (incompletes)?

## Tips on getting off to a good start!

Your students will need to register, enroll, and then actually enter your course, depending on the nature of your course or program. Student services may be provided, or you may have to deal with how your students will know what to do, when, and how to access your course.

No matter what your situation, you should NOT expect to see all your students arrive in your course on the first day of the term. Problems with access, awareness, hardware, software, the Internet, connections, the phone/modem, the network, registration/enrollment, account creation, and so on will inevitably occur for your students.

At the beginning of the semester, encourage ALL of your students to get familiar with the specific learning management system environment for your course. Have a few warm-up activities designed to get everyone to know each other and to practice using the features specific to your online course environment. These activities will not only have them practice doing the kind of things they will be doing in your course, but can be designed to introduce the course and begin to support the development of a sense of class community.

### Getting Started

Post an "ice breaker" discussion in the first module. Using the mechanisms for conducting an online discussion in your course, ask students why they took the course, what they know about the topic, what expectations they have, one thing they really hope to learn, etc. This will help everyone get to know each other, and you may gain insight into prior knowledge and expectations. You can practice and model a good online discussion, and students who enroll late, or have technical difficulties, will not be so far behind.

Consider creating a pre-welcome email message that you can forward to students as they appear in your course over the course of the first week.

Consider sending out an introductory letter to your students that specifies the first off-line reading assignments for the first couple of weeks. If students have technical problems they can do the initial reading, know what they should be preparing, and not be so far behind when they finally get online. You may also want to design the activities in your course for the first couple of weeks with this in mind.

Consider using a self-test type feature in your **course development tool** the first week of class as a comprehension check on the course information documents for your course. This "check" can ensure that students read the pertinent information and eliminate questions later on in the course. It also introduces the testing capability to students in an unthreatening way.

### Be responsive

You should log in on a scheduled basis—especially at the beginning of the semester. Students will be wondering "who is out there" and you can help them by responding right away.

Respond to all student email immediately. Email should only be used for private communication between student and instructor. If the message is not private in nature and better posted as question or as a Bulletin Board item, ask the student to post it in the appropriate place in the course.

Check for questions in your course regularly (especially during the first few weeks) and respond immediately to student queries. Technical problems should be directed to the technical helpdesk if you have one.

Grade and return evaluated assignments to students as quickly as you can. Give students feedback on their performance and participation in your course early with suggestions on how to improve their work to meet your expectations.

**If you experience difficulties . . .**

Contact your help source immediately if you believe something is not working in your course, or if you notice some unexpected change.

## Course management tips to keep students engaged

- Use the features or options in your course to make announcements and post bulletin board items.
- Check your course frequently, especially in the beginning. Immediately respond to questions or discussion as appropriate. Your response gives your students a sense of security and lets them know everything is functioning correctly.
- Have all students create personal profile documents as a means of introducing themselves to you and the class. Encourage them to share photos and Internet resources, either in the profile, or in other course areas.
- Check for and resolve technical or user problems in both your and student documents.
- Check to see that students are responding in the appropriate locations in the course. If you see a problem, create an announcement to address the issue, or provide immediate corrective feedback to the students.
- Check for empty student documents created by accident. Your students may not be able to delete their own documents, so you should delete empty or duplicate documents.
- In order to keep the class moving, make sure that there is something "new" for the students at least every 2-3 days. If students are not moving the discussion along, you might comment on existing responses, and invite students to respond again. Or, put a note in the course announcements area encouraging students to participate. If some students continue to remain silent, consider sending them a "prodding" email message. (Perhaps ask if there is anything preventing them from participating at the moment, e.g., a trip, illness, technical difficulties etc.)
- Call on students by name.
- Be responsive.
- Create as many possibilities for student interaction as you can. Encouragement rather than nagging is a more effective strategy to increase participation.

## **You can support student success in your online course:**

1. Provide frequent, timely, helpful, and positive feedback.
2. Pinpoint and positively call out specific things in student work.
3. Be helpful and encourage students to do the right thing.
4. Raise questions that make student really examine their ideas and what they are studying.
5. Be accessible.
6. Be present.
7. Be timely in your interactions and with your feedback.
8. Offer supportive comments, compliments, and encouragements.
9. Pose challenging questions.
10. Encourage self-reflection and evaluation.
11. Encourage peer evaluation.
12. Provide opportunities for students to make choices in course assignments that allow them to relate their work to their real lives or to use their skills and interests.
13. Encourage high levels of helpful interaction between students.
14. Encourage peer support and peer interaction and collaboration in the course to address and alleviate the sense of isolation online students feel.
15. Maintain high expectations and communicate them to students.
16. Provide a course schedule with assignments and due dates to make planning and time management easier.
17. Use the grade book make student self-monitoring of progress in the course easier.
18. Identify students at risk and take preventive action.
19. Provide exemplar/model assignments.
20. Create an environment where students feel they have access to you, their classmates, resources, and help—and where their questions can get answered.
21. Recognize and acknowledge student success, effort, and accomplishments with course work, life challenges, and with technology used in the course.
22. Draw student attention to how the skills they develop in your course and the material they learn will be useful in their real lives and will help them be successful in the future.
23. Encourage and reinforce the need for managing time well.
24. Ask students for clarification to prevent misunderstanding.
25. Provide opportunities and online course space for non-course related interactions between students.
26. Make sure students know how to get technical help. Recommend that they get help immediately and early.
27. Provide students with information on tutoring services, or where students can go to get help with their writing (campus writing center).
28. Reassure students that they can be successful in your online course and give them tips on how (for example, collect stories from and suggestions from past students in the form of advice for future students).

## Final Things to Consider:

1. Consider participation by students during the first two - three weeks of the term who don't necessarily end up enrolled in your course. Students will have access to the courses "they say" they are enrolled in. Verification of enrollments will be made based on final course rosters from your campus, usually about the third week of the term. Consider putting a "reminder" message about registration on your course map, which identifies the deadline for registration at your campus, and possibly provide your campus Registrar's Office's telephone number for questions.
2. Consider what you will do with "late starters." Be prepared to tell them where to start and how to catch up (e.g., Consider alternate assignments such as summarizing closed discussions rather than trying to go back and participate).
3. Make your first written or graded assignment one that can be done independently of the second so that late starters can jump in to the current topic while simultaneously catching up. Or, prepare alternative assignments for late starters.
4. Verify students logging on against your official course roster. Follow up with students who have not participated by the end of the first week of class.
5. Communicate with your Help Sources concerning anything that seems out of order in your course, particularly in the first 3 weeks.
6. Call your Help Sources any time you or your students cannot access your course, or are experiencing problems that prevent normal participation.
7. Don't become a helpdesk for your students. If your institution offers technical support for students, use it. While it may be tempting to answer students' questions, this is not the best use of your time and blurs boundaries for distance students. Even if you know the answer, refer *non-course-related questions* to the appropriate source. Appropriate referrals will help students understand your role as professor more clearly.
8. Encourage public posting of questions or comments; discourage private communications/email which can add significantly to your workload. Train students early to use areas and features of your course for communications. It is more efficient to answer a question once in a public place. When a student emails you with such a question, you might respond, "This is a good question. Would you mind if I posted it?" or "Would you be willing to post your question, so that other students can see the answer?"
9. Set and maintain a regular logon schedule. You should log in on a scheduled basis—especially at the beginning of the semester. Students will be wondering "who is out there" and you can help them by responding.
10. Don't worry. Breathe. You can do this! It will be okay!

### Keep notes on any changes you want to make to your course

In anticipation of the evaluation and revision stage of your course development process, you should keep notes during the teaching phase of your course. If your **course development tool** allows, create a private/hidden document within your course to keep any notes, reminders, or changes you plan directly in the course itself. Notes on any issues or problems that emerge for you as you teach, or that are commented on by students can help in the evaluation and revision of your course. As you teach, think about:

- What is working?
- What isn't? Why?
- What could be improved? How?

Thoughts, general or specific, on the design, structure, pacing, and/or sequencing of the course, or of any of your activities should be documented for future reference. Use whatever mechanism is available to you in your **course development tool** to create and save a private document to keep a running note of comments, thoughts, plans, revisions for your course, activities, or the environment.

Note: In addition, you may consider creating a similar "to do" document to track your thoughts and plans during the development phase of your course.

## Final Revisions Checklist

Use the checklist below to do a final review of your online course. This should be your very last review and revision.

### Check the following:

YES NO

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Proofread the entire course.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Verify consistency of font, font size, and color in all documents.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spell-check every document.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Print all documents intended for printing to make sure they look OK.          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Test links to make sure they act as planned.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Test each activity/assignment as a student to make sure they work as planned. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Create a profile for yourself.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Create a “welcome” announcement for your students.                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Post something on the Bulletin Board.   |

*Complete or revise your course to address the list items (not) checked.*

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## Activities

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### Online Course Activities

Continue to:

- Participate as a student in the asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the design of your own online course.
- Reflect on who you are and how you teach, and what you want to do and how you want to be perceived as an online educator.
- 
- Consider who your students will be, what your assumptions might be about them, teaching and learning online in general, and the online course design/development process.
- 
- Consider the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

- Review your course and make the necessary refinements to the structure, instructional documents, content, learning activities, etc.
- Thoroughly review the first 3 modules of your course to be sure they are ready for students.
- Prepare for each activity as much in advance as possible.
- Practice the skills you will be using to teach and manage your online course.
- Created a private document in your course to keep track of ideas for improvements, changes, and revisions to your course as you teach it.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

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In the sixth step you:

- Learned how to manage your course.
- Created or put the finishing touches on class community elements, such as your own personal profile, your introduction, the announcement, bulletin board, etc.
- Practiced the skills you will use to teach and manage your online course.
- Reviewed best practices and strategies for effective course management.

*You are now ready to teach your course!  
But you are not done yet!*

*Don't forget, after you have piloted your course, the last step  
in your course development process will be to move on to  
**Step 7: Evolve.***



## Step 7: Implement

### Overview, Purpose, and Objectives

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#### Overview

Once you have taught your course, you will be expected to review, evaluate, and ultimately to revise your course as the last step in your Course Development Process.

#### Purpose

The purposes of this step in the Online Course Design Process are to:

- Plan a review and evaluation of your online course.
- Document the revisions you intend to make to your online course.
- Identify those things that you will change or improve in the next iteration of the online course.

#### Objectives:

- Create a private document in your online course to document and keep track of any ideas for improvements, changes, and/or revisions.
- Implement a student evaluation as a culminating activity in your course, and after the course ends, review this student feedback.
- Once the course is over, implement your evaluation and review plan: identify the changes and redesign necessary, and make the necessary revisions to prepare the course for the next time.

## Background

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For the purpose of assessing your course you should consider:

- What worked?
- What didn't? Why?
- What could be improved? How?

Once you conclude the delivery phase you can use this information to review, evaluate, and document the revisions you want to make to your course in anticipation of the next time you teach it.

### Things to think about when ending an online course

- How will you end the course?
- Will you send a group “good-bye” email, or post something in your course?
- Is there an online mechanism to send students their final grades via email built in to your course? Will students get their grades from your institution via some other mechanism?
- What is the end date for your course?
- How will you deal with students who do not complete the course on time?
- Do you want to survey your students for feedback?
- Does your institution require and implement a course evaluation?
- Have you made/kept a copy of your course for yourself?

### Evaluate your course

This is the last step in your online course development process. Once you conclude the teaching phase of your course, you should evaluate the course and your experience. Review any notes you made to yourself as you taught and review student feedback to assess the necessary improvements and revisions to the structure or activities in your course.

#### Things to consider:

- What worked?
- What didn't? Why?
- What could be improved? How?
- Were discussions successful?
- Were your assignments and other activities successful?
- Did you get through all the modules in the course?
- Did most students complete the course?
- How was the workload for you and for your students? Were you able to keep up?
- Was there anything missing?
- Were there any points in the course where you noticed that students did not do an activity, or did not understand the activity?

You may want to ask a colleague or instructional designer to do a review of your course after it has concluded. You can use the checklists found in Step 5 again to guide or focus summative evaluations of your course materials, interactions, and activities.

If you conducted a culminating activity in your course as recommended, or a midterm feedback forum,

review these student comments as part of the evaluation and revision planning process for your course. In addition, look at the types of questions your students had and where they had them. Activities, assignments, and areas in your course that did not go as expected or intended may indicate a need for revision. If there was any apparent confusion or a bunch of questions about the same thing - that would most likely indicate that more instructions, clearer instructions, or details are necessary.

## Resources

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### **Course Quality Rubric and Self-assessment**

<http://commons.suny.edu/cote/course-supports/oscqr-rubric/>

<http://sln.suny.edu/teachingsurvey>

### **Diigo**

<http://diigo.com>

### **Audacity**

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

### **Screencast-o-Matic**

<http://screencast-o-matic.com/>

### **JingProject**

<http://www.jingproject.com/>

### **Adobe Presenter 10**

Adobe Presenter 10 software lets you create HD video lectures for classroom teaching, distance learning, flipped learning and MOOC sessions.

<http://www.adobe.com/products/presenter.html> (formerly Macromedia Breeze)

### **Voicethread**

<https://voicethread.com/>

**Podomatic:** Featuring 2 million podcasts from the world's best independent podcasters.

<http://www.podomatic.com/>

### **YouTube**

<https://www.youtube.com/>

### **Vimeo**

A video-sharing website in which users can upload, share and view videos

<https://vimeo.com/>

## Best Practices

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### Review Your Course

The purpose of this step in the process is to provide you as the instructor with the opportunity to reflect upon and self-assess your course and online teaching and learning experiences.

Based on your experiences so far, you may have some indication of what may need improvement in your online course. No matter what, there are always ways to improve your online teaching and learning environment. Keep in mind that evaluation and revision of your online course is an ongoing process. You may want to consult with an instructional designer if one is available to you for any revisions/changes to your course.

A number of tools are available to assist with the review and continuous improvement of online courses.

#### The OSCQR Rubric

[The Open SUNY COTE Quality Review \(OSCQR\) rubric](#) can be used in various ways to review your course.

1. You can use it as a self-assessment.
2. An online instructional designer can use it to conduct a review of your.
3. You can use it with a team approach to gain feedback for improvements from multiple perspectives.

The OSCQR Rubric also has a separate tab for measuring accessibility.

#### Teaching Presence and Class Community: Reflection, Evaluation, & Revision

Our best practices show that high levels of "Teaching Presence" (Anderson, 2001) - effective instructional design and organization, facilitation of productive discourse and direct instruction - positively and significantly influence the satisfaction and reported learning of online students.

There is also evidence to suggest that a strong sense of community in the classroom helps reduce student feelings of isolation and "burnout" associated with higher attrition levels in both classroom-based and distance learning. A positive sense of community also promotes the likelihood of student support and information flow, commitment to group goals, cooperation among members and satisfaction with group processes and efforts [e.g. Rovai (2002)].

Teaching Presence is the facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the realization of personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. In a learner-centered teaching and learning environment, teaching presence is demonstrated not only by the instructor, but also by the students.

Classroom Community is comprised of various elements of community including trust, spirit, connectedness, belonging, membership, various forms of support, and the rich and productive milieu that communities of practice can engender for teaching and learning.

Class community and teaching presence can be expressed in an online course in the following ways:

1. Class Community (by Instructor & Students)
  - Connectedness
  - Building social/group spirit
  - Establishing trust
  - Learning
  - Engaging in supportive contact and interaction
  - Sharing educational expectations
2. Instructional Design and Organization (by Instructor)
  - Setting the curriculum
  - Designing methods
  - Establishing time parameters
  - Utilizing the medium effectively
  - Establishing Netiquette
3. Facilitating Discourse/Interaction (by Instructor & Students)
  - Identifying areas of agreement/disagreement
  - Seeking to reach consensus
  - Reinforcing student contributions
  - Setting climate for learning
  - Drawing in participants, prompting discussion/interaction
  - Assessing the efficacy of the process
4. Direct Instruction (by Instructor & Students)
  - Presenting content/questions
  - Focusing the discussion on specific issues
  - Confirming understanding
  - Diagnosing misconceptions
  - Injecting knowledge from diverse sources

An online survey has been designed to assist you to self-assess based on the indicators of teaching presence, to help you identify areas in your course that you can target for improvement: Teaching Presence Survey: <http://sln.suny.edu/teachingsurvey/>

This online faculty self-assessment is a simple survey. You are asked to self-assess on 20 specific indicators of teaching presence from the CoI model and the development of online class community. It generates a report giving you a numerical score for each indicator that corresponds to a key of score ranges. You can then see, based on your own self-evaluation, what specific areas in the online course need (1) redesign, (2) need some improvement, or (3) effectively demonstrate class community and teaching presence and need no improvement.

You can then use the results independently to update your online course in preparation for the next delivery, or you can use it to work with an instructional designer to pinpoint areas in a course that could be improved.

A companion to the survey (appended below) provides examples of the indicators, and suggestions that you can use to make improvements in those indicated areas in your self-assessment.

There is a relationship between teaching presence and the development of community in online learning environments; courses characterized by effective teaching presence are more likely to develop a stronger sense of community on the part of students.

If you feel that the class community elements in your course need improvement, review the subcategories of the class community section below and the examples presented as suggestions, alternatives, and places in your course to revise.

Review the Class Community and Teaching Presence indicators, strategies, and suggestions detailed below and consider how they might be applied to making improvements in the revisions to your online course.

## Class Community

| INDICATOR                     | STRATEGIES   | SUGGESTIONS   |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Connectedness:</b>         |  |   |
| Building social/group spirit: | Personal information about yourself, including a photo, audio, video, etc.               | Model expected student behaviors in the introductory activities in your course, in your initial communications, and with your own profile.  |
|                               | "Student Lounge", "Social Cafe", etc.  | Create a module exclusively for social contact/interaction/exchanges between students.<br><br>Create a section in each module where students are encouraged to help each other by answering each other's questions. |
|                               | Phone, chat, Skype, face-to-face, snail mail to students before the opening of a course. | Encourage students to use a "Bulletin Board" for interaction unrelated to course content.<br><br>Consider offline or synchronous contact with students when appropriate.  |
|                               |  | Ask students for help in improving the course; implement a midterm course review. Ask: "What can be improved?" And then make one of their suggested changes in the course for the remainder of the term.            |

## **Class Community**

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|                     |  |  |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Establishing trust: | Study Groups, Peer Evaluations.  | Provide opportunities and recognition for students to support each other.  |
|                     | Student Journals, Private Communications, Talk with the Professor, question areas. | Respond promptly to student concerns.<br><br>Provide clear guidelines for activities in which students interact with each other that encourage them to communicate openly, fairly, and empathetically. |
|                     | Student-led discussions, Pairing students, small groups.                           | Create learning activities for which students must rely on each other.   |
|                     | Brainstorming activities, chain activity.  | Use the first and second person narrative voice as much as possible.   |

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**Learning:**

Engaging in  
supportive contact  
and interaction:

Problem-based  
activities, Case  
Studies, Debates.

Web quest, small  
group discussions or  
projects that open to  
the whole class after  
they are complete.

Establish cooperative learning activities  
that foster student/student interaction and  
group learning.

Create written assignments that are  
viewable by the class. Encourage students  
to comment, peer assess, or provide  
feedback for each other.

Create a learning activity for which  
students discover something as a group. As  
examples - problem-based activities or case  
studies for small groups of students.

Provide prompt feedback and evaluation of  
student performance.

Provide students with options for how they  
make their thinking and learning visible to  
you and to the class. Allow them choices in  
how they can demonstrate their learning.

Encourage students to share and combine  
their research efforts.

Encourage students to respond to each other  
in the Ask a Question area.

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**Learning:**

|                                   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Sharing educational expectations: | Rubrics, Instructions for Discussion.   | Establish Netiquette.   |
|                                   | My Expectations, Course Objectives, How You Will Be Evaluated.                    | Clarify expectations in the Course Information documents.                               |
|                                   | Mid-semester Course Evaluations, Culminating Activity, Suggestion Box/Gripe Fest. | Encourage students to evaluate their experience in your course.                         |
|                                   | Student-led discussions, peer reviews, student presentations.                     | Use course Announcements and other LMS communication tools to communicate expectations. |
|                                   |   | Provide opportunities for students to learn from each other.                            |

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If you feel that the design and organization of your course needs improvement, review the subcategories of the design and organization section below and the examples presented as suggestions, alternatives, and places in your course to revise.

## Teaching Presence

### Instructional Design and Organization

| INDICATOR   | STRATEGIES   | SUGGESTIONS  |
|---|--|--|
| Building curriculum materials   |  | Subdocuments, documents, sections; importing text, graphics; file attachments; tables; using HTML; links.  |
| Integrating external learning objects   |  | MERLOT, OER, YouTube, etc. Check online resources available to you via your textbook publisher. Many textbooks now have companion websites with simulations, self-tests, quizzes, related links, etc.  |
| Designing methods: instructional strategies that help structure learning activities | I am going to divide you into groups, and you will debate... | Written Assignment Area; Discussion Area; Adding an Online Journal section or module; cooperative and collaborative activities; group papers; individual project; structured/virtual seminar; role plays & simulations; In Basket (Manager's Box); Committee Hearing; skits; management lab (corporate business); treasure hunt; web quest; Sam's Café (philosophical perspectives); case study; Preceptor's/Mentor's Module; internships; learning contract.<br><br><i>Resources:</i> MERLOT; course examples; excerpted examples, etc. |
| Establishing time parameters  | Please post a message by Friday...                           | Schedule/calendar function; Announcements; linking to Course Calendar.   |
| Utilizing the medium effectively  |  | Using the right form for the activity. Embedding rather than linking. Understanding how things work and look from the student perspective. Different course areas and views; handling old courses & email lists; Private/Public Communications; clear directions & navigational cues/signposts.  |
| Establishing Netiquette   | Keep your messages short                                     | Course Information; Instructions for Discussion document; My Expectations.   |

| INDICATOR | STRATEGIES | SUGGESTIONS |
|-----------|------------|-------------|
|-----------|------------|-------------|

If you feel that facilitating discourse or interaction your course needs improvement, review the subcategories of the facilitating discourse/interaction section below and the examples presented as suggestions, alternatives and places in your course to revise.

#### Facilitating Discourse/Interaction

| INDICATOR   | STRATEGIES   | SUGGESTIONS  |
|---|--|--|
| Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement                   | Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counter example to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?   | Debating activities; interviews.   |
| Seeking to reach consensus/understanding                          | I think Joe and Mary are saying essentially the same thing.  | Group product; group/shared decision making; inter-community networking (Guest Speaker); polling/survey/balloting; small group discussions; small working groups; team presentations.  |
| Encouraging, acknowledging, and reinforcing student contributions | Thank you, Jo, for your insightful comments.   | Students Helping Students/Peer Assistance; Student-led discussion.   |
| Setting climate for learning                                      | Don't feel self-conscious about "thinking out loud" in this forum. This is a place to try out ideas after all.   | Speaker's Bureau (guest lecturers); learning partnerships; peer learning groups; learning circles; study groups/pairs; Online Classroom.   |
| Drawing in participants, prompting discussion                     | Any thoughts on this issue? Anyone care to comment?<br>Mary, I would like you to dig deeper into your assertion and support it with current credible research. | Free flow discussion; open-ended or thought-provoking questions; brainstorming/brain-writing; free association; In the Hot Seat; The Shot Gun; informal socializing: the online café, online games & simulations (management laboratory; U.N. session); Ice Breaker activities (learning styles quiz); Panel Discussion; Round Table Discussion; symposium; student moderators; Bulletin |

| INDICATOR                             | STRATEGIES  | SUGGESTIONS   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
|                                       |   | Board; Online Office Hours; participate wisely      |
| Assessing the efficacy of the process | I think we are getting a little off track here... | Suggestion Box; Culminating Activity; small groups; |

If you feel that direct instruction your course needs improvement, review the subcategories of the direct instruction section below and the examples presented as suggestions, alternatives and places in your course to revise.

#### **Direct Instruction**

| INDICATOR   | STRATEGIES   | SUGGESTIONS  |
|---|--|--|
| Presenting content and questions                                  | Bates says.... what do you think?  | Virtual lectures; Peer Assistance; discussion & assignment documents.                                |
| Focusing the discussion or directing the activity                 | Question your assumptions! I would ask you to consider...  | Virtual seminar; student-led discussion; group spokesperson or leader.                               |
| Summarizing the discussion or results of an activity              | The original question was... Joe said... Mary said... we concluded that... we still haven't addressed... | Small group reporting.   |
| Confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback | You're close, but you didn't account for ... this is important because...                                | Discussion rating; using rubrics; stand-alone evaluations; feedback module; test & evaluation forms. |

| <b>INDICATOR</b>                         | <b>STRATEGIES</b>  | <b>SUGGESTIONS</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Diagnosing misconceptions                | Remember, Sandy is speaking from an administrative perspective, so be careful when you say...<br><br>What does the research say about learning styles? | Talk with Professor; Peer Assistance; Learning Journal; Question Area; Bulletin Board.                            |
| Injecting knowledge from diverse sources | I was at a conference with George once, and he said... You can find the proceedings from the conference at <a href="http://www...">http://www...</a>   | Online Library Sources, Shared References; Virtual Library/Resources; collective database; Guest Speakers; MERLOT |
| Responding to technical questions        | If you want to include a link in your message you have to...   | Your Institutional Help Sources if any, e.g., HelpDesk, online resources, etc.                                    |

## Revise your course

After your course review, decide on the changes you will make, and document those changes in your private Course Revisions document.

When your course is over, your online course shell—complete with all student documents—becomes a historical record and artifact of your course and the semester. Consider archiving a copy of the course for recordkeeping reasons, as well as a reference for the next time you teach the course. Check with your institution, department, or instructional technology services support for policies and procedures regarding archiving and accessing courses from term to term.

Make detailed notes of all the enhancements, changes, improvements, and revisions you would like to make to the course prior to teaching it again.

### Revisions you must make!

**Don't forget to check each document for possible revisions including:**

- Due dates and time frames specified in course documents, such as the course schedule and individual course assignments.
- Any specific references to a specific term or an individual student.
- Check all external links in your course to make sure they are still active.
- Check your contact information to make sure it is up to date.
- Update your profile and introductory documents if necessary.
- Did you add or change books/materials/activities/prerequisites that need explanation now in your course?
- Check the Bulletin Board to make sure you clean out any outdated or term-specific documents.
- Don't forget to create a new Announcement for your new term.
- If you are using a Course Calendar feature of your course, make sure the dates listed are accurate, up-to-date, consistent and comprehensive.
- Spell check : )

## Online Activities

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### Online Course Activities

While you are developing your course, continue to:

- Participate as a student in the online asynchronous discussion and activities of the online course.
- Be observant and reflect on how that online experience might inform the revisions or redesign of aspects of your own online course.

Once you have actually developed and delivered your first online course, consider the following:

- Reflect on your who you are and how you teach now that you have taught online for the first time.
- Consider who your students were, what your assumptions were about them, about teaching and learning online in general, and on the online course design/development process. How did they match up to the reality?
- Consider what you will do differently next time.
- Consider what you learned about the options and limitations in the online teaching and learning environment.

### Online Course Development Activities

Once you have completed your first online course delivery you will:

- Review and evaluate your online course and document the revisions, changes, and redesign necessary to improve your course.
- Make the necessary revisions to improve your online course for the next delivery.
- Check with your institution, department, and instructional technology support center for any assistance, resources, or training they may offer.

## Review

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In the seventh step you:

- Reviewed best practices and strategies for revising and improving your online course.
- Reviewed your course and any notes you kept for making changes or improvements.
- Made detailed and documented notes on revision to be implemented prior to the next delivery of your course.
- Implemented those planned revisions.

# *Congratulations!*

You have completed your first full cycle of course design, development, delivery, and revision. You are now an experienced online course developer and instructor!

But you are not done... every time you teach online you have the opportunity to learn from the experience and to continuously improve not only the design of your course, but your online teaching practice as well. Use the evaluation and revision materials and suggestions in this module to revise and improve your course every time you teach it.

You and your course will evolve, and you and your students will benefit from that!

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## Appendix A: Applying the Col Framework – an example

\*This section is adapted and used with permission from William Pelz.

### Social Presence

It is important to establish a community of learning in an online course. One way to facilitate this is for the instructor and students to provide social reinforcement to each other. When you agree or disagree with what another student writes, you are providing such feedback. When you respond with an expression of emotion, that also demonstrates social presence.

The exemplary “Criteria” table below lists a few general characteristics of possible discussion submissions. It is the responsibility of the professor to evaluate each discussion response and award quality points accordingly. It should be clear to the students that the number of quality points awarded to each discussion post is not negotiable. In this example, responses that provide this type of feedback will receive 0, 1 or 2 points, depending on their quality, extent, and frequency.

For example, a student who just says "I agree" may get a point the first time, but no points subsequently.

| POINTS | SOCIAL PRESENCE - CRITERIA  |
|--------|---|
| 1-2    | <p>The post projects your personal characteristics into the community of learning - presents yourself as a "real person."</p> <p>Affective - The expression of emotion, feelings, and attitudes</p> <p>Interactive - Evidence that you are reading, attending, and responding to others' understanding, thinking about others' responses</p> <p>Cohesive - Responses that build and sustain a sense of community, belonging, group commitment, or common goals and objectives</p> |

### Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence is the extent to which students are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse (discussion) in a community of inquiry. Cognitive presence can be demonstrated by introducing factual, conceptual, and theoretical knowledge into the discussion. The value of such a response will depend upon the source, clarity, accuracy and comprehensiveness of the knowledge.

| <b>COGNITIVE PRESENCE - CRITERIA</b>  |   |
|---|---|
| Responses that add no academic value receive a 0 or are ungraded, while the more fact or information that the response adds to the discussion, the higher the points awarded up to a 4 point maximum. | <b>POINTS</b>   |
| 0 or ungraded   | Unrated response. The post adds no academic value to the discussion. No new information is presented.   |
| 1   | The post contains at least one usable fact or piece of information. However, the fact or information is available from the textbook.  |
| 2   | The post contains at least one usable fact or piece of information. However, the fact or information is not available from the textbook.  |
| 3   | The post makes a substantial academic contribution. Material is included that is not available just by reading the textbook, and some issue or concept is clarified.  |
| 4   | The post contains documented information that contributes greatly to the understanding of some issue under discussion. The new information is explained and applied such that the reader gains new insight into the material being studied. |

### Teaching Presence

Teaching presence is the facilitation and direction of cognitive and social process for the realization of personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. In a learner-centered teaching and learning environment, teaching presence is demonstrated not only by the instructor, but also by the students.

There are two major ways that both instructors and students can add teaching presence to a discussion:

1. By facilitating the discussion:

- Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement
- Seeking to reach consensus/understanding
- Encouraging, acknowledging, and reinforcing student contributions
- Setting a climate for learning
- Drawing in participants/prompting discussion
- Assessing the efficacy of the process

2. By direct instruction:

- Presenting content and questions
- Focusing the discussion
- Summarizing the discussion
- Confirming understanding
- Diagnosing misperceptions
- Injecting knowledge from diverse sources
- Responding to technical concerns

Keep this in mind not only for evaluating student responses, but also as a guide for facilitating discussion and providing direct instruction in your course.

Student responses are evaluated according to the number of instances of teaching presence present in the response.

| <b>POINTS</b> | <b>TEACHING PRESENCE - CRITERIA</b>  |
|---------------|--|
| 0 or ungraded | Unrated response. The post adds no teaching presence or other value to the discussion. |
| 1             | The post contains one instance of teaching presence (from the list above).             |
| 2             | The post contains two instances of teaching presence (from the list above).            |
| 3             | The post contains three instances of teaching presence (from the list above).          |
| 4             | The post contains four or more instances of teaching presence (from the list above).   |

## Appendix B: Creating and Using a Discussion Rubric

\*This section is adapted and used with permission from William Pelz.

1. Create (with or w/o class collaboration) a quality-based Discussion Post Grading Rubric that considers the following two factors: The quality of the **Message** and the quality of the **Subject Line**.

- The professor assigns the readings (or students select the readings).
- Students post “critical thinking” discussion questions (requires training).
- Students facilitate the ensuing asynchronous discussions (more training).
- Students peer-evaluate the quality of the discussion posts to which they reply.
- Students evaluate the quality of their own discussion posts.
- The professor evaluates the quality of every discussion post and provides ongoing or periodic feedback (constrained by learning management system specific mechanisms).

2. Create a Discussion Forum Grading Scale that considers both the **quality** and the **quantity** of students’ forum submissions.

### EXAMPLE:

**Rule #1: The message of your post must introduce relevant information that teaches us something new.**

- Is your message **accurate**?
- Is it **relevant** to the issue under discussion?
- Have you **taught** us anything new?
- Is your information **properly cited and/or documented**?

**Rule #2: The subject line for your post must be a complete sentence which conveys the main teaching point of your message.**

This requirement is intended to accomplish two goals:

- It **requires you to think** about and clearly state the main point of your message. To do this, you must have a clear understanding of the material. (This aids in learning and memory.)
- It **provides the reader with advance information**, which is helpful in organizing and learning the content of the message. The reader should be able to determine the essence of your comment just by reading your subject line.

## The Discussion Post Grading Rubric

| Points              | Interpretation                  | Grading Criteria   |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 4                   | Excellent (A)                   | The comment is accurate, original, and relevant, teaches us something new, and is well written. Four point comments add substantial teaching presence to the course, and stimulate additional thought about the issue under discussion. Documentation for factual information is provided. |
| 3                   | Above Average (B)               | The comment lacks at least one of the above qualities, but is above average in quality. A three-point comment makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the issue being discussed.  |
| 2                   | Average (C)                     | The comment lacks two or three of the required qualities. Comments that are based upon personal opinion or personal experience often fall within this category.  |
| 1                   | Minimal (D)                     | The comment presents little or no new information. However, one-point comments may provide important social presence and contribute to a collegial atmosphere.   |
| 0                   | Unacceptable (F)                | The comment adds no value to the discussion.   |
| <b>Subject Line</b> | No penalty                      | The subject field is a complete sentence and conveys the main point of the comment. The reader clearly understands the main point of the comment before reading it.  |
| -1                  | Minor problem with subject line | The subject field provides key word(s) only. The reader knows the general area that the comment deals with.  |
| -2                  | Major problem with subject line | The subject field provides little or no information about the comment.   |

## The Discussion Forum Grading Scale

| Forum Grade | Total Quality Points | Additional Requirement                    |
|-------------|----------------------|---|
| A+          | 40+                  | At least eight 4-point ratings.           |
| A           | 31-39                | At least four 4-point ratings.            |
| B           | 25-30                | At least four 3- or 4-point ratings.      |
| C           | 12-24                | At least four 2-, 3-, or 4-point ratings. |
| D           | 6-11                 | None.                                     |
| F           | 1-5                  | None.                                     |
| 0           | 0                    | None.                                     |

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