

Strategies for Effective Online Teaching

1. Effective online instructors challenge their students' thinking and foster active, constructive participation in learning.

- Emphasize the importance of learning by playing an active role in the learning process, not from direct instruction or lecture as in a traditional classroom.
- Provide opportunities for the students to critically critique and/or reflect upon certain course topics.
- Encourage your students to use the Internet for researching on course topics; however, remind them to be critical about the information they will share with peers.
- Encourage your students to be proactive in their learning by doing the following:
 - Regularly logging into course site
 - Submitting assignments on time
 - Completing quizzes within required timeframe
 - Reading messages posted and replying within required timeframe
 - Cooperating with teammates, etc.
- Provide opportunities for your students to be actively involved in information seeking and problem solving.
- Provide opportunities for your students to interact, to collaborate, or to review a peer's work.
- Encourage your students to participate in online discussions actively by:
 - Designing thought-provoking discussion questions: see [Crafting Questions for Online Discussions](http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/online_questions/) http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/online_questions/
 - Encouraging students to respond to questions at a deeper level
 - Using discussion forums effectively by posting "messages that weave several strands of conversation into a summarization that may prompt people to pursue the topic further" (Berge, 1995)
 - Pointing out "opposing perspectives, different directions, or conflicting opinions" (Berge, 1995)
- Use different discussion formats listed below to cultivate students' critical thinking (MacKnight 2000, p40.):
 - Small group discussions
 - Buzz group: two people discussing for a short period of time
 - Case discussions using real-world problems for analysis and suggested solutions
 - Debating teams wherein students present ideas, defend positions, and argue against opposition's reasoning
 - Jigsaw groups where subgroups discuss various parts of a topic and report to the others
 - Role play
- For more information about facilitating online discussions, please see [Ten Tips for Generating Engaged Online Discussions](http://www.wordsworth2.net/activelearning/ecacdustips.htm) by Donna Reiss. <http://www.wordsworth2.net/activelearning/ecacdustips.htm>

2. Effective online instructors provide a good role model for active participation and interact frequently with their students to create a sense of learning community.

- Respond to student comments or questions within time frames set at beginning of the course.
- If circumstances require you to change the time frame for responses, notify students beforehand and provide new time frames.
- If you will be unavailable for some period during the semester (i.e., traveling), notify students beforehand.
- Provide general feedback to the entire class on specific assignments or discussions.
- Provide specific encouragement and comments to students who have completed assignments.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Provide a weekly “wrap up” before the next lesson begins.
- Introduce a new week with an overview (including deadlines) of what is coming up.

3. While recognizing different student learning styles, instructors monitor student progress, identify lagging students, and help them minimize their procrastination through appropriate monitoring and encouragement.

- Be aware that students who fall behind are in jeopardy of not completing the course within the same semester of enrollment. This may endanger student financial aid for the following semester, or student reimbursement of tuition if the student is receiving funds from a third party (such as an employer).
- Many Course Management Systems have tools to track student progress in course activities (e.g. the Tracking feature in D2L allows an instructor to track students’ progress in course activities).
- Contact students who haven’t logged in for over a week to inquire whether they’re experiencing technical difficulties or problems with course content, team communications, etc.
- If students cannot participate due to technical problems, connect them immediately to get technical help.
- Contact students by email or phone who have not completed assignments.
- Send a weekly email summarizing course activities as a general reminder to the whole class near the end of the week.
- Introduce a new week with an overview of upcoming events and deadlines.
- Include flexibility in grading if possible (e.g. Allow students to drop lowest grade); Give choices for when students can complete assignments (e.g. Pick 2 out of 5, etc.).

4. Assessing students' messages in online discussions encourages their participation and helps improve the quality of discussion as well. Set specific assessment criteria and make the criteria available to students in the beginning of the course.

- Include the assessment criteria for online discussions within one or more locations:
 - The course syllabus
 - A course announcement prior to the first online discussion task
 - The instructions for the discussion task
 - Rubrics for discussion in D2L
- Make sure the assessment criteria measure both the quantity and quality of the online messages.
- When designing a rubric for assessing online discussions, consider assigning some points to encourage posting.
- Make use of sample rubrics from literature:
 - **Edelstein & Edwards' (2002) Assessing Effectiveness of Student Participation in Online Discussions.** This rubric considers five categories that are important for building a learning community: promptness and initiative, delivery of post, relevance of post, expression within the post, and contribution to the learning community.
 - **Garrison's, et al. (2001) Cognitive Processing Categories.** May be useful when assessing the quality of postings: (1) triggering (questioning), (2) exploration (information seeking and sharing), (3) integration (providing solution), and (4) solution (testing solutions)
 - **Kleinman's (2005) Grading Rubric for Online Discussion Participation.** Provides detailed grading criteria.
- For more information about facilitating online discussions, please see [Ten Tips for Generating Engaged Online Discussions](http://www.wordsworth2.net/activelearning/ecacdiscustips.htm) by Donna Reiss. <http://www.wordsworth2.net/activelearning/ecacdiscustips.htm>

5. Effective online instructors use appropriate teaching strategies to support, guide, and motivate students to learn actively in the online environment.

- Provide opportunities for student collaboration and facilitate their collaborative learning processes.
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate through online collaboration tools such as discussion and chat.
- Choose the right tone of conversation in online communication to make students feel comfortable with the learning environment, to establish trust in communication, and to reduce feelings of isolation and enhance a sense of community.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Provide a weekly “wrap up” before the next lesson begins.
- Take an active role in helping your students think and learn actively through careful task structuring, questioning, and scaffolding (drawing on students' prior knowledge, modeling an activity beforehand, or introducing motivational techniques to pique student interest.)

- In online discussions, consider:
 - Designing thought-provoking questions to elicit student discussions on the topics of your focus: see [Crafting Questions for Online Discussions](http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/online_questions/) http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/online_questions/
 - Providing a weekly summary of discussion topics to demonstrate your participation
 - Redirecting off-topic discussion through gentle reminders or a recast of the question
 - Assessing messages by both quantity and quality

6. Effective online instructors provide timely, quality, and appropriate feedback to support and facilitate students' learning process.

- Encourage students to articulate their confusion or difficulty with course content, projects, requirements, or instructions for activities.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Respond to students' concerns or technical difficulties quickly and provide contact information of tech support.
- Peer assessment can provide additional feedback opportunity while reducing faculty workload (Ko & Rossen, 2004, p.122).
- In online discussions, your students will feel motivated to participate and learn when you:
 - Encourage openness in online discussions or collaborative assignment and allow different opinions to exist
 - Diagnose misconception without delay to avoid further misunderstanding or confusion, but explain with background information
 - Provide timely feedback to comment, confirm, evaluate, or to question
 - Provide additional important resources for further study
 - Use gentle reminders to carry the discussion further or redirect discussions
 - Encourage your students to use examples, real cases, or literature to support their views

See Anderson et. al (2001) Coding Scheme for Facilitating Discussions for more suggestions

7. Effective online instructors provide support and guidance to encourage students to become self-regulated learners.

- Encourage students to become “process managers” in the online course by giving up some traditional power role as teachers (Palloff & Pratt, 2001).
- Include an introductory survey with questions on student expectations for the course.
- Direct students to take turns leading/moderating online discussions.
- Demonstrate support for student learning by engaging them to reflect on their online learning experiences.
- Encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning as well as their peers' by completing readings and posting meaningful course-related discussions.

- Ask students to self-assess their learning and progress and to post questions to discussion forums or seek help when necessary.
- Provide an opportunity for peer review.

8. Effective online instructors conduct course evaluation during teaching and use the evaluation data to improve their teaching or for future course improvement.

- Set aside a discussion board in the course site soliciting (anonymous) feedback on the course and respond publicly to feedback (See Kleinman (2005) for examples)
- Incorporate student course evaluation data into your teaching
- Encourage and reward students to report substantive errors in the course (Ragan & Terheggen, 2003)

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