

Suggested Principles for Online Teaching at WOU

designed by WOU faculty

The following is a list of suggestions that may be helpful in creating/maintaining a positive experience in your online course.

1. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

Interact concisely and regularly with your students and remain actively engaged in the course.

Before Teaching

Clearly and concisely communicate your standards and expectations to:

- Make expectations and norms clear from the beginning.
- Help students understand the course structure.
- Tell students how they can communicate with you and provide information on expected response times (e.g., email, assignments, exams).
- Make course pages available at the beginning of the term, even if only an introductory page to let students know what to expect.

While Teaching

Engage in regular and timely course interactions and emails throughout the term to:

- Remind students you are actively engaged and available to them.
- Ensure that students feel supported.
- Contribute to forums and discussions.
- Provide timely and regular feedback on assignments.
- Reach out to individuals that may need extra help or do not appear engaged.

TIPS:

- Be prepared to provide guidance to students who aren't familiar with Moodle.
- Don't assume people will understand what you mean – try to be very intentional and clear in your communication.
- Consider using a variety of methods to communicate.
- Try to give feedback on the first assignments quickly so students can improve their behavior early.
- While regular communication is important, try not to overwhelm students. Too much information or repetition can cause students to tune out.
- Consider including a Q&A section where instructors post commonly asked questions about the course and answer student questions for all to view

2. Engage

Actively facilitate student engagement throughout your course.

Before Teaching

Design the course for engagement. Consider

- Spreading students' points out over the term rather than clustering or back-loading.
- Actively keeping the course relevant to your field and to students.

While Teaching

Maintain engagement during your course. Consider

- Hosting regular, optional "virtual" meetings (e.g. Skype, Google Hangout, Moodle Chat).
- Soliciting and encouraging regular student involvement in course activities.
- Being an active facilitator. Create a safe learning space where students can thrive.

After Teaching

Review your course's engagement effectiveness. Consider

- Inviting and facilitating purposeful course evaluations from students.
- Self-reflecting on what went well and what could have gone better.
- Experiencing your course as a student to ensure the course functions as intended.

TIPS:

- To help engage/connect with students and clarify course expectations, consider an early introductory video to the course so students can “see” their instructor and “hear” course expectations/ syllabus review.
- Design your course to encourage maximum engagement and motivate students to learn.
- Be creative. For example, consider “gamifying” your course by requiring students to earn points or complete certain requirements before granting access to next unit or materials. Also, consider giving a small number of points for intermediate tasks and goals, as students progress towards completing larger goals.
- Engage students in new ways by using technology advantageously.

3. Be Consistent

Create a consistent and predictable learning experience.

Before Teaching

Maximize course “predictability”. Consider

- Making the course page easy to navigate
- Making important information (i.e. syllabus, calendar, contact information) easy to find.
- Chunking the course into logical sections (e. g. by weeks or topics) that have a predictable rhythm and feature:
 - the same format/ layout.
 - consistent activity patterns (e.g., *Explore, Engage, Apply*).
 - consistent due dates (e.g., same day of the week and time of day).
- Making assignments available at least a week before the due date so students can plan.

While Teaching

- Consider extending deadlines for students with true extenuating circumstances or when you notice the class may be struggling (as you would for a face-to-face class).

TIPS:

- When offering multiple online courses in a program, consider making the individual course formats similar.
- Consider collaborating with departmental colleagues to create greater consistency in how online course materials are organized to reduce the cognitive load on students.
- Consider using color coding (a visual emphasis) to emphasize important information or organize requirements (example: red for due dates, green for readings, orange for videos)
- Consider naming assignments clearly and unambiguously, such as “Week 1 Forum 1” as opposed to “Forum”. This makes it easier for students to find which grade is for which assignment.
- Students often take online courses because they need to schedule around conflicts. Be mindful of scheduling assignments which are only open for a short time or may otherwise be inconvenient for students.

4. Build Relationships

Get to know your students, and encourage them to get to know you and each other.

Before Teaching

Set up your course so students get to know you and each other. Consider

- Including an introductory activity
- Encouraging (or even requiring) student interaction in discussion forums.
- Providing multiple means for interaction (e.g., discussions, group work, peer review).

While Teaching

Nurture relationships established through the course. Consider

- Using multiple methods to provide support (consider in person and online office hours, email and phone responses, individual outreach)
- Getting to know students individually (in writing, face-to-face, phone calls).

- Adding a personal touch to your messages.
- Providing frequent and clear communication to help build a sense of community.
- Setting up expectations about proper etiquette in online interactions/discussion forums (“net-iquette”) and actively moderating and stepping in or redirecting if needed.
- Thinking carefully. Avoid miscommunication or unintended insensitivity by carefully rereading all communications prior to posting or sending.

TIPS:

- There is little context for written responses so take extra care to communicate sensitively.
- Consider in-person and online office hours and individual email (or even phone) outreach to keep students engaged.
- Help students need to get to know their classmates and build a sense of community.

5. Take advantage of the opportunities that online teaching affords

Create an effective online experience for both you AND your students

Before Teaching

Plan for an effective learning experience. Consider

- Being mindful of the similarities and differences between traditional and online courses.
- Advising students to make scheduling decisions based on the course delivery modality that best fits them.
- Planning for the student who may just want to do the bare minimum.
- Accounting for the increased prep time required for initial set up of an online course.
- Using technology judiciously: Keep in mind what your students have access to with respect to technology and remember that you have limited ability to help them.
- Remembering that some students may live in different time zones and plan accordingly.

While Teaching

Facilitate an effective learning experience. Consider

- Clearly communicating the similarities and differences with online and on-campus courses to your students.
- Emphasizing to students the technology requirements and expectations for the course.
- Helping students realize that online courses are not “easier” and that they will need to dedicate time to engage with the course.
- Planning for improvement – Consider getting (anonymous) feedback early during the term so you have time to adjust within the term. Get feedback at the end of the term.
- Planning time during each week to interact with the course (just as you would show up and teach an in-person class).

TIPS:

- Decide on multimedia before teaching and remember to arrange for transcripts of audio or captions for video to be made to provide for accessible communication.
- Plan for extra time at the beginning of the course to handle the initial burst of communications.
- Consider requesting a lower cap on enrollment the first time you teach an online course.
- “Take your course while you teach your course.” - Revisit the material each time you teach it, to make sure it is relevant and that you are certain that what the student is experiencing is what you intended for them.
- Clearly and consistently communicate deadlines in terms of the Pacific Time Zone
- Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should”. It is easy to link lots of information to the course because you can but that can backfire and become overwhelming and hard for students to manage. Avoid data dumps, be intentional and transparent.
- Avoid excessive enrollment just because a course is online – you will still need to provide feedback and connection for each student and this can take more time than in an in-person class.