

Fundamentals of effective online teaching practice

Effective online teaching is an extension of good teaching practice, just in a different environment. These fundamentals are essentially a series of principles about how humans can best interact online to create an effective and inclusive learning environment.

The principles below are based on the work of [Chickering and Ehrmann](#) (1996), [Garrison, Anderson and Archer](#) (2000) and [Darby and Lang](#) (2020), as well as countless others in our circles who have been sharing their ideas and resources for decades.

Instructor presence

1. **Communicate** – use a welcoming, inclusive tone in announcements and emails. Set **expectations** about communication such as preferred methods, typical time to respond, where to send questions, and boundaries for interaction that are reasonable for both students and instructors (avoid the temptation to *always* be online). Plan to send a global announcement at least once per week, check and respond to email and discussion forums frequently throughout the week.
2. For Fall 2020, plan for primarily **asynchronous** (discussion forums, notated lecture slides, problems, readings, etc.) activities. Under “non-pandemic” circumstances, a **mix of synchronous** (e.g. live Blackboard Collaborate or live chat sessions) and **asynchronous** activities is considered to be the most effective.
 - a. The use of asynchronous learning provides better equity amongst students by limiting bandwidth use, getting around timezone challenges, etc. This can include pre-recording mini-lectures (chunk into discrete concepts, shorter timeframes), notes, learning guides, and other downloadable content to be completed at the student’s convenience.
 - b. Limit synchronous interactions to things that require live demonstration, dialogue about difficult topics, collaborative problem-solving and other instances with a real pedagogical need for this type of interaction; **this will need to be cleared with your Faculty Dean**. Always have a backup plan for technical difficulties, and recording live sessions is normally advisable (depending on content).
3. Plan each **week of learning activities** to **actively engage** students in the learning process; clearly describe for them what they should be doing throughout the week. On average, plan for your students engaging in 6-9 hours of learning activities per week (here is a [useful calculator](#) for estimating that), including lectures, watching videos, readings, working on assignments, independent research etc. Emphasize time on task over ‘contact hours’. Design opportunities to engage deeply with learning in authentic contexts, rather than surface approaches.



4. Write or record (video, audio) short **weekly overviews** outlining key learning activities for the week.
5. Use **more than one** assessment approach to evaluate students' achievement of the course learning outcomes – consider alternatives to traditional exams for some of your assessment. Wherever possible, consider more authentic assessments that allow students to demonstrate performance in an applied context through [non-disposable assignments](#). Provide a low-stakes opportunity to practice assessment, especially for exams.
6. There is no silver bullet to resolve all concerns about **academic integrity** – it requires a multi-strategy approach including building a **culture of integrity, pedagogical approaches, assessment approaches, technology, and education** on academic responsibilities. Start by **trusting your students** – if they have chosen to study in Fall 2020, they likely genuinely want to learn. Some will attempt to subvert any steps you put in place, but this is no different to the on-campus setting; don't punish or negatively label all students for the behaviour of a few.
7. Provide prompt **feedback** on assessment.
8. **Office hours** are a critical support for students (especially online). Set aside time for responding to questions each day and offer a time to be available synchronously each week. Be flexible with how this support is made available and offered. Use Blackboard Collaborate, phone, discussion forums, or email to respond to student questions - the point is to be available for questions and support.
9. **Model the behaviour** you expect from students, through emails, announcements, start up and wrap up discussion posts, and make that modelling visible (i.e. explicitly discuss the model)
10. Consider carefully what **technology** your students will have access to. Many will be trying to work on a phone or tablet, may be sharing a device, and may have poor internet access. Before using high bandwidth tools and practices, consider whether there is a **low cost and low-tech alternative**. Consider surveying students in the first week or before class starts to find out what technology they have access to and their experience in online learning.
11. **Practice pedagogies of care:** These are unusual times and we need to care for ourselves, and our students to get through them. That means making pedagogical decisions that are based in caring and grace. You won't get this online teaching thing perfectly right the first time through; it is an iterative process. Do what you reasonably can with the best interests of your students and yourself in mind. Trust your students. Expect that many students will be experiencing trauma and dislocation, may be caring for loved ones, and may be facing financial distress.
12. **Check in with students** personally if you notice them disengaging – try to help them stay focused through frequent feedback, contact, and monitoring engagement in the Blackboard dashboard. Allow space for guided independent learning wherever possible.
13. Consider principles of **accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** in all your pedagogical decisions. Blackboard Ally can assist you in identifying any issues and creating accessible content.

Social presence

1. Post a short **introductory video** about the course and yourself; open a discussion forum for students to introduce themselves and encourage them to share only what they are comfortable



Originally created by the Office of Open Learning, University of Windsor
www.uwindsor.ca/openlearning. Modified with permission.

2. Be **visible, available and responsive** to your students through multiple modes – email, discussion forums, Blackboard Collaborate, but set boundaries
3. Create a water cooler discussion forum as a place for students to **share and connect**
4. Encourage students to communicate, **collaborate and share** what they are learning with each other; use smaller group activities where feasible to build community and connection between students

Cognitive presence

1. Use a **backward design process** – start with your **learning outcomes**, then design **assessment** to evaluate them, then the **supporting learning activities and content**; where do we want to go, how will we know when we've arrived, and how will we get there? The enclosed workbook, courtesy of Trent University, can assist with this.
2. Use a table, concept map, or visual syllabus to **map the content of the course** (lectures, textbook chapters, videos, other readings, assignments, learning activities etc.) to the learning outcomes and make this available to students to help them see the course at a high level; make the purpose of class activities and assessments explicit
3. Design your **Blackboard Learn course shell** with a consistent and simple layout e.g. one folder per week containing all the content for the week and an explanation for what to do with it, assessment all in one folder, use the library resource list tool (Leganto – coming soon!) for collating readings and other resources
4. Collect and curate a **diverse range of resources/content** to support learning in the course – go beyond a textbook to include other relevant and/or up to date readings, Open Educational Resources (OERs), websites, news reports, online videos, instructor-created content, simulations, virtual labs, cases; your library liaison can help find resources and address copyright questions about content you want to use online. Consider moving to an **open textbook** or other **no-cost solutions** to increase accessibility of resources and costs to students
5. Use **discussion forums** to create community, encourage student-student engagement, support learners who have English as an additional language, provide space for students to process before responding to a prompt, provide a space to explore large, messy questions/challenges
6. Encourage **metacognition** by embedding questions and activities that help students to reflect on their learning – e.g. small formative quizzes, problems, reflection prompts

