



Checklist for Online Instructors



Before the online course begins . . .

Technical Expectations

Course Management System

- Get acquainted with the course management system and access tutorials showing how to use specific features including:
 - the dropbox
 - posting, editing and reordering news announcements
 - adding or rearranging discussion prompts on the discussion board
 - setting up quizzes and surveys.

Course Maintenance

- Review all course hyperlinks to readings and supplementary resources and update broken links and remove dead links. Nothing says "stale" or "outdated" faster than a dead link. Links can disappear overnight. A link dated 2001 may still work but provide seriously obsolete information and data. Keep resources fresh and current each term.

Reference Citations

- Verify that all referenced sources are properly cited. Model how to cite sources and images ethically and legally for students.

Course Multimedia Accessibility

- Test course navigation and correct to solve accessibility issues.
- Contact technical support staff for assistance in adding enhancements such as podcasts, video introductions, and video lectures to the online course and verify that all multimedia meets disability accommodation requirements such as closed captions on videos, transcripts of all audio and videos including YouTube videos, proper use of heading tags in news announcements.
- Check all media for proper display, video playback, and create alt tags for all images.

News and Announcements

- Create an audio or video welcome from the instructor in the first module or post a photo and brief biography in the news area of the course for the opening day of the class.

- Enter the release dates for news announcements copied forward from a previous term.

Gradebook Set Up

- Confirm online gradebook settings are accurate for total assessment.

Virus Protection

- Update virus protection on your computer because files will be coming from many sources, and students may not be as careful with anti-virus updates.
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Managerial – Course Organization Expectations

Course Calendar

- Create a course calendar that clearly outlines due dates for readings and assignments. If the course involves group work and student-to-student feedback, clearly communicating time parameters and staying on schedule is vital to keep pace with the course. Students need to be able to access the calendar from any page of the course.

Syllabus

- Contact information, preferred communication method, expected response times to email messages and questions (preferably 24 hours), and expected response time for timely feedback on assignments including whether students will receive feedback in the dropbox or the online gradebook.
- Articulate the course "late policy" clearly.
- Identify specific expectations for frequency of responses/postings on the discussion board.
- Include links to the academic honesty policy.

Welcome Email

- Send a welcome message to students including the required textbooks and/or software and other material needed, how to purchase, rent or download the material in ample time for them to acquire them prior to the first day of class. If possible, arrange for a linked excerpt or PDF copy of Week 1 readings for students who are waiting for delivery of materials on Day 1 of the course.
- Include information about whom to contact for technical assistance with logging into email or the course management system.
- Include information about disability accommodation.

Include information about what date the course will open for pre-class orientation to reduce anxiety, provide preview time and resolve technical issues before the course begins.

Announce your office hours and/or email response timing. Students need to know how soon they can expect to get a reply from you.

Pre-course Survey

Create a pre-course survey to learn more about each student. Verify contact information and discover students' specific learning goals and background.

Student Orientation

Create an orientation page explaining the school's course management system, or provide a link to existing tutorials that the school's technical department has created.

Use a "scavenger hunt" activity to get students acclimated to the Discussion Board, Content, Dropbox, etc., and read the course requirements in the syllabus and course calendar.

Start the pre-class time with a Module Zero that consists of information on procedures, links to tutorials, screen captures of various course tools, etc.

Student Contact Info Spreadsheet

Update a spreadsheet listing student phone numbers including home and cell phones and email addresses. As the course progresses, this resource will save time when contacting students personally. A telephone call can provide the personal touch needed to show support for a wavering student. A friendly voice and "you're doing great" makes the work easier to approach.

Pedagogical / Instructional Design Expectations

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Review Module One and update information to communicate important course goals and learning outcomes clearly.

Netiquette/Ground Rules

Establish netiquette rules or course ground rules emphasizing how to participate in online discussion forums, behaviors acceptable in the online learning environment, and polite forms of online interaction. (For example, a friendly positive tone is required in all postings on the discussion board, students are encouraged to ask questions in the Q & A topic within each module, students are encouraged to connect with others in the course.)

Provide a group activity to develop course ground rules in a wiki, or a scavenger hunt activity for students to review information provided in the syllabus, course calendar, and netiquette guidelines.

Discussion Prompts

Set up or revise the course discussion prompts to encourage critical thinking on the discussion board.

Past Course Evaluations

Review past course evaluations to determine enhancement for instructional strategies.

Course Assignments

Review and revise assignments to emphasize a high level of Bloom's Taxonomy and help avoid the possibility of plagiarism.



During the first week of the online course . . .

Managerial Expectations

Contact Missing Students and Draw in Participants

Watch out for non-participants during the first week of class and contact them by phone to see if they have login/access difficulties.

Inform Students about Withdrawal Timeline

Be acutely aware of the refund policy and withdrawal deadlines. If the student is unable to gain access to course materials or decides this is not the right class, inform the student about the deadline and how to contact the registrar, as the decision needs to be made promptly.

Minimize Delays

If students are late adds, contact them promptly with support information about how to gain access to course materials, login to the course management system.

Social Expectations

Set the Climate for Learning

Communicate regularly through announcement or news area. Nothing makes an online student feel more isolated or alienated than the sense that the instructor is rarely present.

Create an Icebreaker to Build the Sense of Community

Facilitate an icebreaker activity related to a course key objective or content and give your students the opportunity to show their human side as well as their academic prowess. Encourage students to share background info, personal interests, perhaps a "what makes me unique," to encourage participation as three-dimensional people.

Encourage students to post a photo or other representation (avatar) on their student profile.

Invite Students to the Student Lounge

Create a "student lounge" discussion area. This gives students a forum to exchange ideas casually and off-topic. Such a discussion area can be designated to eliminate casual chat out in the academic discussions.

Pedagogical / Instructional Design Expectations

Communicate with Students Daily to Build a Positive Rapport

Model discussion response behavior and tone. Use a conversational tone that is inviting, personal, friendly, and encouraging.

Monitor the discussion area daily. Reinforce student discussion board contributions and provide positive explanatory feedback (personally) to those who make the discussion area a better place through their participation. Watch for laggards who sit out the forum and flammers who use personal put-downs or attacks to impress or sound authoritative. Intervene, reference the discussion rubric, and provide a safe learning environment before it poisons the discussion area for all.

Contact Non-participants

Watch for laggards who sit out the forum, and contact them privately to see if they need help or encouragement to participate.

Ask the Class Questions

Challenge your students by asking questions that apply to the readings and communicate high expectations.



Throughout the online course . . .

Managerial Expectations

Provide Reminders about the Course Rubrics

- Utilize rubrics to make expectations clear and set criteria for excellent achievement.

Open and Close Course Materials

- Open and close content or discussion forums to optimize student learning and avoid confusion.

Update the Online Gradebook Promptly

- Keep the online gradebook current after assignment due dates. Use comments and narrative feedback as often as possible to support or explain assessments and maintain privacy of student grades and feedback.

Encourage Use of Library Online Databases

- Provide links to the school's academic support, online tutorial for library online databases, library and help desk. Encourage students to research relevant issues and find answers to content questions.

Monitor Attendance

- Check number of postings and frequency and follow up with missing students.

Announce Your Absence to Students

- If the instructor must be offline for a day or more, announce the absence to students with guidance of whom to contact during the absence.

Provide Deadline Reminders

- Remind students of upcoming deadlines. Conduct course according to the designated calendar with any deviations communicated to students in advance.

Social Expectations

Organize Collaborative Projects

Assign small groups, dyads to achieve strong social interaction or create a method for students to select groups before beginning group projects. Invite and encourage students to complete a peer review of individual and group projects.

Create areas for group members to work on group projects on the discussion board.

Post group rosters in the news announcements before group projects begin.

Monitor Discussions for Civil Behavior

Enforce netiquette standards and school behavior policies. Immediately contact students with inappropriate posts for explanation and clarification.

Make disrespectful postings unavailable to the class at large.

Use Announcements to Keep Class Current

Post reminders about important due dates, holiday wishes, and new-found resources.

Maintain a Daily Presence in Discussion Forums

Provide positive feedback for exemplary postings. Refocus the discussion when students go off topic.

Provide Individual Messages of Encouragement

Send an email or post on the discussion board words of encouragement. Respect and facilitate diverse talents and ways of learning.

Pedagogical / Instructional Design Expectations

Provide Supportive Information to Supplement Course Content

Inject knowledge from diverse sources to assign student learning (references to articles, textbooks, personal experiences, or links to relevant external websites.) Use illustrations and examples to clearly explain important concepts.

Respond to Student Questions within 24 hours.

Provide timely feedback and practical suggestions for student to complete their work on time.

Summarize Discussions and Seek to Reach Consensus

Participate in discussions when appropriate. Know when to be the "guide on the side" and when to step in and redirect or supplement or summarize student participation. You're the authority, but take care to avoid stifling student expression by dominating the discussion.

Diagnose Misconceptions in Discussion Postings

Help students revise their thinking in a way that helps to learn by correcting misunderstandings and presenting critical thinking questions.

Create Transitions

Post news announcements that transition from one topic or module to the next to help students recognize time on task.

Use the Chat Feature for Explanatory Feedback

Use a scheduled chat room or Skype discussion so that students can hear the instructor's voice and those of their classmates, if appropriate. When students have questions about the final paper, for example, a live discussion can save a lot of repetition of common questions. The course management system's chat feature may be used and archived for students who are unable to participate and want to review the discussion at a later time.

Provide Meaningful and Timely Feedback

Evaluate student work promptly and provide meaningful feedback. Rubrics can be very effective in making expectations clear and setting criteria for excellent achievement. Encourage learning strategies which promote self-directed learning.

Provide alternative assignments and assessments to accommodate students' individual needs when possible.

Use the Dropbox

Avoid using e-mail for submission and evaluation of student work, if possible. Utilize the dropbox to reduce opportunities for students to argue that they "sent it but you never acknowledged it." Using the courseware management for assignment submission provides a receipt to the student and a documented date and time of submission (or the lack of it) in the event that there is a disagreement over incomplete work. It also provides an established, predictable location for students to receive feedback from you.

Keep a Journal

Each week enter journal entries as the course progresses. What worked well? What needs adjustment or replacement? Are the assessments measuring the learning outcomes? Get permission and save examples of exemplary student work to use as models in future terms.

Technical Expectations

Provide technical updates as you receive them from the university.

- Announce information related to interruptions of access to servers delivering course materials in advance.
- Direct students to the Help Desk for technical support with email and the courseware management system.

Consistently address universal accessibility.

- Create an accessible online course where individuals with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of the educational environment.



During the last week of the online course . . .

Managerial Expectations

Report Final Grades Promptly

- Respect the major investment your students have made in your course. In some cases, advancement on the pay scale or reimbursement of tuition depends on their successful completion of your class and an official grade report.

Encourage Students to Complete the End-of-course Survey

- Use students' honest feedback on the course to hone your teaching skills and course contents.

Review Your Teaching Journal

- List technical aspects that worked well and those that need improvement.
- Analyze your personal observations and list what worked well and what needs modification next term.
- Identify areas of emerging technology to add for the next term, such as a wiki, blog, podcast, or YouTube video.

Social Expectations

Use the News and Discussion Tools to End the Course on a Cordial Note

- Post a news announcement with a closing personal message to students.
 - Encourage students to share their class experiences and say good bye in a closing discussion forum.
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Pedagogical / Instructional Design Expectations

Provide Feedback on Final Projects

- Employ a variety of feedback methods, such as audio files and Camtasia videos, in addition to written responses.

Berge, Z.L. (1995). Facilitating Computer Conferencing: Recommendations From the Field. *Educational Technology*. 35(1) 22-30

Liu, X., Bonk, C., Magjuka, R., Lee, S., & Su, B. (2005). Exploring four dimensions of online instructor roles: A program level case study. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 9(4), 29-48.

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