



Increasing Interaction in Your Online and Hybrid Courses

Checklist and User's Guide

Proven techniques for building positive and productive interaction among online learners are listed in the left column and are broken down into three phases: *Design and Organization*, *Communicating Requirements*, and *Collaboration and Facilitation*.¹ If you would like more information or ideas about how to implement each step, you can find rationales, tools, and resources in the right column.

Designing and Organizing Your Course

- Identify the important topics and goals.**
 - Make sure that the interactive or collaborative activities in your course tie back to your topics and goals.

- Develop activities that will interest, motivate, and engage students.**
 - Ask students to contribute to the learning process.
 - Provide students with the freedom to explore and pursue their interests.
 - Expose students to different perspectives.
 - Allow students to share what they have learned with their peers.

Rationale: While the topics and goals of the course may seem obvious to you, especially if you have previously taught the course, it is important to carefully consider and define what students need from the course and how this may fit into the curriculum and/or their academic experience.

Tools: pen and paper; PowerPoint; [Bubbl.us brainstorming tool](http://Bubbl.us)

Resources: [Texas Tech University: Writing and assessing course-level student learning outcomes \(PDF\)](#); [The Florida State University: Instruction at FSU Handbook, Chapter 2- Determining learning objectives \(PDF\)](#)

Rationale: Activities that allow students to be creative, to pursue their own interests, and that are based in real world contexts are more likely to engage students.

Tools: Will depend on the activity, however, a few general tools include:

- Discussion forums or wikis, which can foster a good combination of independent and collaborative work
- Case studies or “real” problems from your experiences
- Students can conduct their own interviews or surveys
- Students can record audiovisual presentations or tutorials on a topic of interest using Wimba or Screencast-o-Matic

Resources: Internet searches for creative activities conducted by others in your field; Connely Librarians can help students with their independent research; [The Florida State University: Instruction at FSU Handbook, Chapter 8 - Using active learning in the classroom \(PDF\)](#); [EDUCAUSE: Wikify Your Course](#)

¹ This checklist is adapted from: Arbaugh, J. B., Cleveland-Innes, M., Diaz, S. R., Garrison, D. R., Ice, P., Richardson, J., Shea, P., & Swan, K. P. (2008). Community of Inquiry Survey. Retrieved from: <http://communitiesofinquiry.com/methodology>.

Designing and Organizing Your Course, continued

- Organize collaborative spaces and tools so that they are easy to find.**
 - Materials should be organized into weekly folders or by related topics.
 - When assignments require the use of certain tools, links should be used to provide ready access to those tools.
 - Navigation menus should provide quick access to the tools that are most frequently used in the course.

Rationale: A disorganized course can be a barrier to students' learning. Students should be able to quickly identify what they are supposed to be doing and all of the key resources needed to accomplish those tasks.

Tools: Blackboard folders and links; clear titles and instructions

Resources: La Salle's Instructional Design team can review your course organization and provide feedback; [Blackboard tutorials on building your course](#)

Communicating Requirements

- Explain the topics and goals to your students.**
 - Put your course topics and goals in your syllabus.
 - Introduce the course topics and goals to your students or have a discussion about them.
 - Explain how these topics and goals fit into a larger context of your discipline or practice.

Rationale: Your students will find it helpful to know where they are headed and this can assist them with organizing their learning. You may find it useful to ask about their preconceived notions and what they had hoped to gain when they enrolled in the course.

Tools: You can present your topics and goals by pre-recording a lecture using PowerPoint, holding a synchronous session in Wimba, or by creating discussion questions using Blackboard discussion forums or even wikis.

Resources: If you're unfamiliar with any of the above tools, La Salle's Instructional Design team can help; [La Salle's 1900 Tech blog has great ideas for presenting content to students](#)

Communicating Requirements, continued



Develop clear instructions for learning activities, including:

- The goals of each activity or assignment.
- The criteria used to evaluate students' work.
- Due dates.
- Whether there are specific tools that students should use, and resources on how to use those tools.
- For group work, specify the expected levels of participation and how participation factors into grading.
- A public space where students can ask questions about assignments, so that all students can benefit from the clarification.

Rationale: These details will provide students with the tools and information that they need to be successful and reduce possible misunderstandings. It can also eliminate the need for the instructor to provide these clarifications to each student individually in the days before the assignment.

Tools: Blackboard items, assignments and discussion forums; posting good examples of previous students' work; audiovisual demos

Resources: [Blackboard tutorials on communication and collaboration](#); [Help Students Become More Comfortable with Online Assessments](#); [EDUCAUSE: 7 Things You Should Know About Assessing Online Team-Based Learning](#)



Set guidelines for course communications:

- Define your expectations for students' written work in the course.
- Provide tips that will help students become comfortable participating in an online academic environment.

Rationale: Students that are new to online learning may be used to the more informal writing typically found online and may not fully understand the level of quality and professionalism that you might expect for your course communications. Clarifying this early in the semester will make sure that both you and your students share the same expectations about how you will communicate in online discussions, emails and assignments.

Tools: Good and bad examples of the type of communication you expect in your online class

Resources: [Lake Superior College: Netiquette Guidelines](#); [Example of Discussion Thread Expectations](#)

Collaboration and Facilitation



Create opportunities for everyone to get to know each other.

- Develop introductory activities that reveal useful information about who your students are and where they are headed.
- Ask student to relate the course topics to their own experiences.
- Encourage students to read and respond to each other's contributions, ideally as part of their grade for course activities.
- Develop surveys to gain more information about your students (such as their levels of expertise or goals).

Rationale: Strong relationships can boost everyone's investment in the course (including your own) and provide motivation for students to put in extra effort, especially in group scenarios. Knowing your students can also help you to present information in a way that will better connect with them.

Tools: Blackboard or [SurveyMonkey surveys](#); discussion forums; blogs

Resources: [Illinois Online Network: Icebreakers](#); [Blackboard tutorials on communication and collaboration](#)



Encourage participation and regularly provide feedback.

- Make it a point to provide positive and constructive feedback to each student during the first two weeks of class.
- Regularly provide feedback to students throughout the semester.
- Participate in activities, exemplifying the type and tone of participation that you hope to see from students.

Rationale: Students need to develop a good understanding of what you expect from them and whether they are or are not meeting those expectations. Early feedback can give students the opportunity to improve throughout the semester. Showing your dedication to helping your students to be successful can build trust and rapport.

It also important that you participate in course activities in a way that demonstrates what you want from students and shows your active presence. Though, instructors have to be careful that they don't overshadow the contributions of other students. It is a balancing act.

Tools: Blackboard Grade Center feedback; rubrics; email; online chat via Wimba or [Join.Me](#); discussions forums; blogs

Resources: [Illinois Online Network: Strategies for Providing Feedback in Online Courses](#); [ASCD: Chapter 1. Feedback: An Overview](#); [Kathy Schrock's Guide to Everything: Assessments and Rubrics](#); [Blackboard tutorials on assessing learners](#)

Collaboration and Facilitation, continued

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Guide the class toward understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Correct errors or misconceptions.<input type="checkbox"/> Provide resources that will help students to understand the material when you see that they are confused or struggling.<input type="checkbox"/> Seize opportunities to enrich the conversation with key questions, articles, or considerations. | <p>Rationale: During collaborative activities, the instructor often needs to act as a facilitator or moderator. In this role, your goal is to make sure that student-led activities are on track, productive, and accurate. You can also share supplemental resources when you see a need.</p> <p>Tools: Demos; examples and resources; audio, visual, or video presentations that provide another method of delivery or perspective</p> <p>Resources: La Salle’s 1900 Tech blog has ideas for using images or video</p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Help students see the big picture during interactive activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Give students the opportunity to identify takeaways or draw conclusions from collaborative work. | <p>Rationale: Active discussions and group work can generate a lot of information. These activities will be more valuable if students can see the big picture. As the instructor, you can take on this role, by summarizing the overall themes. Or, you can ask students to reflect on their learning, such as by asking them to identify the benefits and challenges of a learning experience.</p> <p>Tools: Journals; blogs; discussion forums; group areas</p> <p>Resources: EDUCAUSE: E-Journaling</p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Push students further by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging students to explore new concepts.<input type="checkbox"/> Asking follow-up questions or for specific examples.<input type="checkbox"/> Playing “devil’s advocate.” | <p>Rationale: Once you have established a learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions in the course, you can begin to push them further so that they delve more deeply into the subject matter. However, doing this too early in the semester may threaten students and discourage participation. Pushing students should be done gradually, using positive and encouraging language, and only once you feel that the environment for this has been established.</p> <p>Tools: Email; discussion forums; blogs; Blackboard Grade Center feedback</p> <p>Resources: EDUCAUSE: Teaching Critical Thinking Through Online Discussions (PDF); Grand Canyon University, Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching: Fostering Critical Thinking in Asynchronous Discussions (Video)</p> |