



Guidelines for Online Teaching

Fundamental Values and Practices for Online Teaching

- **Be present in class.**

Consider the hours a week you would spend with your students in class. This is the amount of time you should aim to be present in an online course. This time needs to be meaningful and engaging. If you are visible and present in your online class, the students are more likely to be as well. Below are some suggestions on how to be present:

- *Introductions.* Record a quick introduction and greeting to include in the first week. Have students participate as well so you can all begin to learn a little something about each other.
- *Post announcements.* Recap the prior week and review upcoming week's work and topics. Offer a tip, quote, or challenge of the week. The announcements could be written or could also be pre-recorded video announcements that would offer a little more engagement.
- *Follow-up on questions.* Be sure to respond and follow-up on any questions that come in through email or through some type of discussion boards. Discussion boards can also be used to work between students but you should respond to questions that are directly asked of you. In addition, comment on random forums so the students know you are reviewing and reading through the thoughts and ideas they are posting.
- *Hold office hours.* Online office hours should occur just as you would for a traditional in classroom course. Hold weekly office hours based on a schedule or by appointment.
- *Offer recorded or live sessions.* Offer quick recorded videos on misconceptions of work or topics of interest. Hold live review sessions using Webex to review topics, cover a specific problem, or just engage students in discussion.
- *Grade in a timely manner.* Grade and return work to students in a timely manner.

In all of these opportunities for being present, be sure to be yourself and to be human. Strive to use your unique voice when writing announcements, assignments, or responding to questions. Infuse your writing with warmth and always convey support. This holds true for any video recordings you may choose to offer. Let your personality and passion shine through. ***Students appreciate seeing your face and hearing your voice.***

- **Organize course content intuitively.**

Think like a student when you are organizing your course materials. The design of your course content should be methodical, sequential, and purposeful. Structural support is important to try and eliminate unnecessary confusion. Make your class an inviting place to be.

- As you build your content in the LMS, use the student preview function to navigate your course and make sure your flow is easy to understand. Is it clear where things are found?

- Think about how the use of menus, modules, folders, and other organizing structures helps or hinders students' progress through the course. Be sure to balance out the clicking and scrolling functions.
 - Are instructions clear? Do you define how students should cite? Do you offer a detailed grading rubric? Do you provide an example of a successful final project, so students understand your expectations? Are expectations clear? Aim for a balance between thorough and digestible.
 - Have a colleague evaluate your online course and offer some suggestions.
 - Consider adding visual appeal to your content. If you have a lot of written notes or instructions, break up long chunks of text with subheadings, bullets, or spacing. Add in relevant images or videos when appropriate. *All visuals must be accessible to all students.*
 - When working hard to make your online classroom an inviting place to be, the tone of your structure will be heavily reviewed. Convey optimism that students can succeed. Show compassion for your busy online learners. Respect their time and engagement by being present and engaged yourself.
- **Framework learning activities and examples.**

Students need to have the opportunity to build activities step-by-step. Offer some time and examples to help them feel comfortable with final steps in an assignment or assessment method.

 - If students are asked to create a final video presentation, be sure to give them some time to work with the video software before submission. Additionally, think about creating a small video assignment which could be about one to two minutes and where you can assign points and offer feedback.
 - As part of the course orientation, ask students to upload a PDF or sample of a hand written assignment.
 - Offer different ways of understanding a topic by using a video that explains the topic in a different way. Another thought could be to invite a guest speaker using a live video meeting so that the students can hear from another expert in your field.
 - Provide as many examples whenever possible. Students like to see examples from previous students' work as appropriate.
 - **Commit to continuous improvement.**

As with any course, whether in class or online, always welcome continuous improvement. Ask for feedback from your students. Learn from what occurred in the current course, and look at how you can improve for the next time the course runs. Take advantage of any professional development opportunities focused on teaching online courses.

Communication Netiquette Guide for Online Courses

When communicating online, you should always:

- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in email or any other communication.
- Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof., or if in doubt use Mr. or Ms.
- Unless specifically invited, don't refer to your instructor by first name.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Remember that all college level communication should have correct spelling and grammar (this includes discussion boards).
- Avoid slang terms such as "wassup?" and texting abbreviations such as "u" instead of "you."
- Use standard fonts such as Arial, Calibri or Times new Roman and use a size 10 or 12 pt. font
- Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETTED AS YELLING.
- Limit and possibly avoid the use of emoticons like
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or sound offensive.
- Be careful with personal information (both yours and other's).
- Do not send confidential information via e-mail.

When you send an email to your instructor, teaching assistant, or classmates, you should:

- Use a descriptive subject line.
- Be brief.
- Avoid attachments unless you are sure your recipients can open them.
- Avoid HTML in favor of plain text.
- Sign your message with your name and return e-mail address.
- Think before you send the e-mail to more than one person. Does everyone really need to see your message?
- Be sure you REALLY want everyone to receive your response when you click, "reply all."
- Be sure that the message author intended for the information to be passed along before you click the "forward" button.

Online Discussion Board Etiquette

Online Discussion Guidelines to Include on Course Syllabus

Will you be offering online discussions in your course? If so, below are suggestions of guidelines to include in your course syllabus so all of the students are aware of the rules.

- All students must participate in the online discussion. Class points will be awarded to those who participate with meaningful contributions to the discussion.
- Students are encouraged to support each other in this interactive shared learning experience. If someone needs help with the technology or has a question on the online discussion, students are welcome to assist each other.
- When writing in an online discussion board, it is a requirement to use proper writing style and to correct spelling and grammar. Write as if you were drafting a term paper. For each online

discussion forum, the instructor should define if students should be citing. If citing, define how formal the citation should be written.

- Everyone must respect each other. Offensive language or derogatory/sarcastic comments will not be accepted. The class and online discussion forums are to be a safe place for all to learn. There will be immediate action taken if a situation occurs where someone has been disrespectful. In addition, tantrums will not be tolerated in online discussion forums. Criticism must be constructive, well-meaning, and well-articulated.

Online Discussion Board Tips to Offer Students

- Make posts that are on topic and within the scope of the course material.
- Take your posts seriously and review and edit your posts before sending.
- Be as brief as possible while still making a thorough comment.
- Always give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source.
- Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying.
- Don't repeat someone else's post without adding something of your own to it.
- Avoid short, generic replies such as, "I agree." You should include why you agree or add to the previous point.
- Always be respectful of others' opinions even when they differ from your own.
- When you disagree with someone, you should express your differing opinion in a respectful, non-critical way.
- Be open-minded.

Resources for Including Inclusivity in Your Online Classroom

It is an important goal as educators to ensure we are building online learning environments where all students feel welcome and equal. Creating a safe space for all to be part of is critical to the success of any course whether online or face-to-face. Below are some resources that are available which offer guidelines on how to ensure inclusivity is a top priority in your course design:

- [How to create an inclusive online class](#)
- [Inclusivity: Universal Design Strategies for the Online Classroom](#)
- [Cultural Inclusivity in Online Learning](#)

Resources for Recording Lectures

Rensselaer's MultiMedia Services hosts a MyMediasite workshop every term to review benefits, best practices, and tips for video creation. Below is a quick tip card from the workshop offering guidelines and support to get you started with recording:

- [Beyond Lecture Capture Quick Card – Video Production Benefits, Best Practices and Tips](#)