

## Course Management and Learner Guidance

### 1 What is it?

Both face-to-face and online courses require a clear structure for students to follow. Online courses, however, require students to understand this structure with minimal in-person guidance. There are several learner-centered practices for setting up a course and creating course policies that can best guide learners in an online learning environment.

### 2 Why is it important?

Students in online classes are typically expected to take ownership of their learning with the support of their peers and instructor. Many students have not been adequately prepared for managing their own time before taking their first online course. Creating predictable patterns for course activities will aid students in planning and managing their learning and non-learning time (Faculty Focus, n.d.).

### 3 How to do it?

To support students' satisfaction and engagement in online learning, help students learn to be self-motivated and self-regulated through strategies and supports, including a detailed course schedule, clear course policies, a specific communication plan, and a short discussion on time management strategies. Policies and supports should be included in the syllabus outlining major considerations for expected behaviors, netiquette, plagiarism, ways to resolve issues (e.g., contacting an instructor). Additional supports and guidance can be provided as part of the structure of your course. Finally, maintain open lines of communications to ensure that students feel comfortable and open to contact you in case of challenges with the course or grievances with other students.

### 3.1 Tips and Tricks

- **Course structure that supports independence.** Set up a course structure that is easy and intuitive for students to navigate, even if they may not have prior online learning experience. Provide additional supports that may help navigation, including:
  - A clear location for the syllabus and supporting documents (e.g., “Start Here”)
  - Overviews and deadlines for activities
  - Course readings, discussions, and other activities clearly labeled
  - Opportunities for students to communicate outside of the immediate course (chat spaces, Zoom, ed tech collaboration tools)
  - Provide general course FAQs
- **Overview for students new to online learning.** Create a short lecture, discussion, or activity that covers time management strategies. [The Center for Advising & Academic Success \(CAAS\)](#) can help with strategies. Make this discussion tailored to the specific course by giving students estimated amounts of time they will spend on instructional content and assignments.
- **Structure and monitor student behaviors online.** Clearly state rules for online behavior and communication (netiquette). Monitor student communication and posts to ensure that students follow the rules.
- **Structure class participation.** Give students a time frame and minimum requirements for class participation activities. If participation is graded, set up a clear rubric and give the students the rubric to inform them about the requirements.
- **Time management supports.** Moodle can be used to set up announcements of when assignments are due. Announcements give students an active reminder of due dates and important events.

To add an event in Moodle see: [Events](#).

Have sections of the course outline available in multiple places, such as in the syllabus or at the start of each unit.

- **Hold virtual office hours.** Virtual office hours (e.g. [Zoom](#), [Skype](#), [Google Hangouts](#)) allow students to meet and ask questions about concepts and assignments and also allow instructor(s) and student(s) to build rapport. Setting a clear policy and providing incentives for attending office hours (such as review materials) will improve student attendance.
- **At-risk proactive communication.** Engage at-risk students in communication to address any issues related to challenges with the course (e.g., missed discussions, assignment deadlines) and suggest ways to remedy the situation, as well as clearly stating the consequences for not taking action.
- **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.** Include a section on academic integrity and plagiarism in the syllabus. Shape assignments to avoid plagiarism. Such assignments can focus on strategies that help students critically analyze and synthesize information (e.g., reflections, critique).

## 4 Additional resources

- [Faculty Focus: 11 Strategies for Managing Your Online Courses](#)
- [Whittier College's Academic Honesty Webpage](#)

## 5 References

- Doyle, T. (2008). *Helping students learn in a learner-centered environment: A guide to facilitating learning in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Faculty Focus. (n.d.). 10 principles of effective online teaching: Best practices in distance education. Special Report. Available from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/free-reports/principles-of-effective-online-teaching-best-practices-in-distance-education/>
- Stavredes, T. (2011). *Effective online teaching: Foundations and strategies for student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Thormann, J., & Zimmerman, I. K. (2012). *The complete step-by-step guide to designing and teaching online courses*. New York, NY : Teachers College Press
- Vai, M. & Sosulski, K. (2016). *Essentials of online course design: A standards-based guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York, NY: Routledge.

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