

# College of Liberal Studies

## Teaching Online: Tips and Recommendations

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The world of online teaching and learning continues to evolve at a very rapid pace, and the incorporation of new technologies and programs continues to make it possible to connect with students and to achieve stated learning outcomes in new ways.

At the same time, though, the same rapid rollout of new web applications, computer technologies, and gadgets may create distractions and make it possible to lose sight of the teaching process.

This guide is designed to help you maintain a clear focus on the teaching process and to develop your own set of best practices that will allow you to obtain the best possible results in teaching your course.

### Before the Course Starts: Learning Goals and Outcomes

As you prepare to teach your course, it is very helpful to review the course goals and outcomes in order to develop a teaching strategy that will work for you.

- \*What do the learners need to learn in this course?
- \*What constitutes evidence that they have achieved their learning goals?
- \*What should successful student work and participation look like?
- \*How and when can you guide students effectively?

### What does online teaching involve?

The strength and effectiveness of today's online learning environment (improved e-learning software, learning managements systems etc.) rest in rich interaction and the ability to have access to a wide range of resources on-demand. Faculty now have more resources and can implement more strategies than before.

In fact, today's best practices foreground the facilitation skills of the instructor:

Guide and facilitate.

Inspire.

Help students achieve learning outcomes --

give them steps to follow

point them to examples

encourage interaction and collaboration with other students

guide and encourage obtaining materials from online repositories

Be sure to interact with students in a significant way. It is important to realize that your role is more than that of a grader and an evaluator. You can inspire, motivate, and encourage.

### Top Ten Ways to Have a Positive Online Teaching Experience

- 1---Create a warm, supportive, and welcoming environment.
- 2---Set goals, and let the students know what you expect. Keep things transparent and open.
- 3---Keep lines of communication open. Give students more than one way to be in touch (email, discussion board, phone)
- 4---Respond quickly to concerns, problems, worries. Problem-solve and trouble-shoot. Allay fears.
- 5---Provide announcements in the portal page and in the discussion area in a way that encourages interaction

- 6---Keep curiosity alive -- pique students' interest with posts, discussion board activity, multimedia, images, new information. Use audio, video, images, and links to websites.
- 7---Samples and examples of completed assignments.
- 8---Tips for accomplishing required tasks. Guide students along the way.
- 9---Clear grading policy, maintain up-to-date gradebook.
- 10---Share stories, your own interests. Humanize yourself.

### **Teaching Philosophy: You don't have to give up your ideas and philosophies...**

Examine Your Teaching Philosophy. What are your priorities? What do you value? How can you envision translating this to online?

1. Interaction and engagement with the professor, fellow students, the material
2. Active learning
3. Synthesis of concepts and ideas
4. Group, collaborative, socially-influenced learning
5. Constructivist ideas

### **What do I, the learner, need?**

I need to feel I belong. (Need for affiliation) (McClelland)

I need to have the freedom to learn in a way that fits my preferences. (Learning preferences)

I need to feel I'm empowered. (Glasser)

I need to feel engaged, motivated, and intrigued. I feel best when I'm learning and having fun at the same time. (Gagne)

### **Examples of Effective Discussion Board Prompts for CLS courses.**

#### *Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Example 1:*

Course-Spanning Task: Please post your topic and describe why it appeals to you. Where will you look for articles and other resources? List two or three places, and then respond to at least two fellow students.

#### *Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Example 2:*

Internet Research: Please discuss one challenge, or one surprising thing you discovered when you were working on your assignment that involved online research. Then, respond to at least two fellow students.

#### *Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Example 3:*

Responding to Readings / Postings: Please respond to one of the readings or works of art / media, and describe your response to it. How did the readings you are doing for the course make you look at the work in a new way? Please describe your initial response, and then your response after relating it to the other readings for this unit. Then, respond to at least two fellow students.

## Keys to Effective Online Teaching

**1---Avoid the “student as receptacle” model. Don’t “push” content. Encourage interaction. Student actively seek the content, relate it to themselves, their experience.**

Theoretical support: Constructivism / social development theory / andragogy  
People learn from each other and from their social interactions. One key finding that cognitive psychologists have found is that people do not learn well when they passively observe information. Instead, they learn by means of interaction with others. The resulting knowledge has been “constructed” and, as long as people interact, the construction process will continue. Learning and knowledge acquisition are dynamic.

**2---Incorporate images, graphics, video. Build on the fact that most people are visual learners. Post visuals.**

Theoretical support: Multiple intelligences / Multimedia and learning, split-channel theories.  
People learn in different manners, depending on their individual learning styles or preferences. Consequently, in order to maximize effectiveness, one must accommodate individual preferences, which include visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and others. Online learning is often very good for visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners, who appreciate hands-on activities and interaction with media. One must be very careful to avoid overloading the learner and creating distractions, which will impede learning.

Please try incorporating a welcome video. The IT team can help you create your own introduction and video podcast.

**3---Use announcements, discussions, and e-mails to present material in multiple ways. What do you share? What types of discussion threads can you use? Graphics, examples, step-by-step instructions, case studies, articles, bullet points, frequently-asked questions.**

Theoretical support: Cognition / scaffolding.  
People learn quickly when they can build upon solid bases of knowledge. When organizing knowledge, be sure that it is sequential, it increases in complexity, and the information is blocked together in “chunks.” The term “scaffolding” is often used to describe the way in which course content is presented so that it builds upon each stage.

**4---Use the discussion board and student interaction to encourage collaboration, enthusiasm, to allay anxiety.**

Theoretical support: Collaborative learning / learner anxiety.  
Individuals are able to achieve peak performance and to learn with ease when they feel they are part of a community of supportive fellow learners, and when they feel comfortable, confident, and have a positive set of beliefs about their own abilities.

**5---Keep your tone conversational. Recognize and reward positive behaviors.**

Theoretical support: Learning conditions / stimulus – response / learner anxiety  
If an instructor finds a way to reduce psychological barriers and distance, the atmosphere will be more conducive to learning. Many learners feel comfortable once they believe they can trust their instructor, and when the relationship contains elements of mentoring. If the environment is friendly and supportive, elearners will feel better about taking risks, exploring, experimenting, and discussing their ideas. If they are rewarded, they will tend to repeat the positive behaviors. Further, if the atmosphere is relaxed,

students will tend to observe and interact with fellow students, learn from each other, and communicate more freely.

### **6---Real-world lessons. Lessons learned approach.**

Theoretical support: Experiential learning.

Adult learners respond very well to assignments and readings that bring to mind their own experiences and life lessons. “Learn by doing” and “hands-on” are very effective for many learners, especially those whose preferred learning style is kinaesthetic. “Learning by doing” applies to online courses in particular because of the numerous skills required in using interfaces to develop computer skills.

### **7---Create a supportive, warm, relaxed environment.**

Theoretical support: Need for affiliation / learner anxiety

According to researchers who have investigated needs, motivation, and how people think of themselves in groups, the need for affiliation ranks high on fundamental needs. It is important for people to feel they are a part of a group. Once accepted into a group, the collaborative activities can occur and many types of learning can take place. Since people learn from each other, it is all the more vital to be a part of a group. If individuals feel safe and comfortable, able to relate to each other, they will feel motivated to engage in the learning process.

### **8---Are you curious? Ask questions, make people curious, pique interest. Engage the learners' emotions. Use case studies, tell illustrative stories.**

Theoretical support: Engagement, conditions of learning / case study

A learning environment that engages the learner, creates learner interest, hold a learner's attention and focus can help keep students' enthusiasm at a high level. Being able to capture the learner's curiosity can help one overcome initial fear or resistance. Effective means of engaging attention include the use of graphics, media, and stories. However, one has to be careful not to distract the learner. It is also very important to maintain focus and to make sure the content is in line with learning objectives and outcomes. While multimedia, design, and catchy discussion prompts can engage students, it is also important to engage students through shared stories and experiences.

### **9---Share suggestions about how to break up tasks into manageable chunks, and how to goal-set. Reward yourself when you finish a task.**

Theoretical support: Motivation

One major element in keeping learners engaged from start to finish is motivation. There are many ways to motivate students to feel good about completing tasks, participating in discussions, and completing their larger projects. One way is to look at the “rewards” that will occur upon the completion of desired activities. For example, the student may be rewarded by participating in the discussion board by means of a positive and encouraging response by the instructor. Prompt and accurate feedback is another kind of reward, to which students respond very well. Techniques for maximizing rewarded behaviors and teaching students how to internalize rewards include goal-setting, breaking tasks into small, manageable chunks, and finding virtual “study buddies” for support.

### **10 --- Provide timely and effective feedback.**

Theoretical support: Motivation and need for recognition

Motivating students can be linked to satisfying their needs for accomplishment and recognition. One very straightforward way to accomplish the goal is to make use of gradebooks and dropboxes.