Asnuntuck Community College

Faculty Compendium of Online Teaching Tips

A collection of online and remote teaching tips that engage students and save faculty time

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Setting Up Your Online Course

Introduction and Course Guide Videos

My classes are asynchronous and since it is hard to schedule virtual meetings to accommodate all my student's schedules, I create and post lots of videos using WebEx. In my videos I have introduced myself, shared my screen to demonstrate how to navigate the course, and reviewed in detail major assignments and projects. While I still offer virtual office hours (which a few students attend), I think it has been helpful to post these videos so students can "get to know me" and also provide some help for those who are more auditory and visual learners.

Tammy Tudryn, Early Childhood Education
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Connecting with Each and Every Student

My first assignment is always a 1 point "Let's Communicate."

I create an assignment in Blackboard, the students have to send me an email asking for the secret word or phrase.   I will then respond with some stupid word or phrase. They then submit it in a Blackboard assignment, and I give them 1 point.

This proves that 1) They can communicate to me. 2) I can communicate back to them. 3) They know how to submit an assignment in Blackboard.

I also create a sub-folder in Blackboard under the class folder for each student as they send me an email. This way right up front I have email sub-folders for each student to store their communications with me.

Paul Gruhn, Web Design
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Create a Reference List of the Names (and Pronouns) Your Students Prefer

If you're teaching an asynchronous course online, you likely won't have the benefit of seeing all students' faces to help you learn their names and pronouns. *A student's name as it appears in Blackboard may not be the name or nickname they prefer to be called.* If you do an initial icebreaker (like a first discussion board post) in which you ask students to share what they like to be called, *make use of this the first time you read it.*

Create an Excel file or Google Sheet (or use a paper gradebook) to log all of your online students' preferred names and pronouns the first time they share this information. If you don't do a public icebreaker, can find out what your students prefer to be called through an easy bonus assignment (which also gives them practice submitting an online assignment).

You'll want to have their preferred names handy whenever you're giving them written feedback or replying to their discussion board posts. It's harder to remember preferred names when you are constantly seeing their official gradebook names presented in Blackboard.

Joe Finckel, English
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Let Students See and Hear You Using Videos

I use "Mashup" --> Kaltura Media to create my announcements. I make a weekly video announcement so they get to see me. I often wear stupid things, and I change my background around to see if the catch it. But this is better than just sending text announcements, it helps them see me and my facial expressions.

Paul Gruhn, Web Design
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Students Don't Know They Can Get Microsoft Office For Free

Most students seem completely unaware that, as students, they have free access to Microsoft Office 365 (including Word, Publisher, PowerPoint, and Excel)—software that will really help them as college students. I put the following information right in my Blackboard courses in my "Getting Started" area:

Free Microsoft Word
All community college students in Connecticut are eligible for FREE use of Microsoft ProPlus Office (which includes Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, and other apps). For information on how to register for and install it, use the link below:
https://supportcenter.ct.edu/service/Office365/Office365_ProPlus.pdf
Remember: it's entirely free! You shouldn't have to pay at any point in the process.

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Netiquette: Establishing Standards for How Students Communicate in Online Courses

Netiquette is essential in an LRON or ONLN course. The following guidelines are from http://www.rasmussen.edu, paraphrased to fit my courses.

Jim Wilkinson, Business
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1. NO YELLING, PLEASE
There's a time and a place for everything—BUT IN MOST SITUATIONS TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS INAPPROPRIATE.

2. Sarcasm and/or criticism can (and will) backfire
Sarcasm has been the source of plenty of misguided arguments online, as it can be incredibly difficult to understand the commenter's intent. What may seem like an obvious joke to you could come across as off-putting or rude to those who don't know you personally. As a rule of thumb, it's best to avoid sarcasm altogether in an online classroom. Instead, lean toward being polite and direct in the way you communicate to avoid these issues.

3. Don't Abuse the Discussion
Discussions about Course Questions are incorporated into helpful resource *or* a major distraction—it all depends on how well students know their classroom netiquette. "Rather

than asking relevant questions or giving clear answers, students might use the discussion to ask questions irrelevant to the discussion, or to talk about an unrelated topic," says Erin Lynch, senior educator at Test Innovators. The discussion isn't an instant messenger like you'd use with friends. Treat it like the learning tool it's meant to be, and try not to distract your classmates with off-topic discussions.

4. Attempt to find your own answer
If you're confused or stuck on an assignment, your first instinct may be to immediately ask a question. But before you ask, take the time to try to figure it out on your own.
For questions related to class structure, such as due dates or policies, refer to your syllabus and module outline.

5. Stop … grammar time!
Always make an effort to use proper punctuation, spelling and grammar. Trying to decipher a string of misspelled words with erratic punctuation frustrates the reader and distracts from the point of your message. On the other hand, it's important to be reasonable about others' grammar mistakes. Nobody likes the grammar police, and scolding a classmate because he or she used "your" instead of "you're" isn't practicing proper netiquette.

6. Set a respectful tone
"An increasingly common netiquette faux pas is treating e-correspondence with faculty and staff as an ongoing chat among friends," says Alexey Timbul, online professor at the Academy of Art University. Every day may feel like casual Friday in an online classroom where you don't see anyone in person, but a certain level of formality is still expected in your communication with instructors. In addition to proper punctuation and spelling, it's good netiquette to use respectful greetings and signatures, full sentences and even the same old "please" and "thank you" you use in real life.

7. Submit files the right way
You won't be printing assignments and handing to them to your teacher in person, so knowing how to properly submit your work online is key to your success as an online student. Online course instructors often establish ground rules for file assignment submissions, like naming conventions that help them keep things organized or acceptable file formats. Ignoring these instructions is a common example of bad netiquette. "Receiving work that does not adhere to the file format and naming protocol means a student is not paying attention," says Timbul. If you don't follow instructions, you're taking the risk that your instructor won't be able to find or open your assignment. Save yourself and your instructor a headache and read their instructions carefully before submitting.

8. Read first
Take some time to read through each of the previous discussion post responses before writing your own response. If the original post asked a specific question, there's a good

chance someone has already answered it. Submitting an answer that is eerily similar to a classmate's indicates to the instructor that you haven't paid attention to the conversation thus far. Remember, discussions can move fairly quickly so it's important to absorb all of the information before crafting your reply. Building upon a classmate's thought or attempting to add something new to the conversation will show your instructor you've been paying attention.

9. Think before you type

A passing comment spoken in class can be forgotten a few minutes later, but what you share in an online classroom is part of a permanent digital record. "Whether or not privacy settings are in place, the internet has a tendency to house things forever, and what you say privately can easily become public," advises etiquette expert Devoreaux Walton. Not only is it good practice to be guarded when it comes to personal information, you always want to be just as respectful toward others as you would be if you were sitting in the same room together. Zink says a good rule of thumb to follow is if you're comfortable standing up in front of a classroom and saying your message, then it's most likely okay to share.

10. Be kind and professional

It will be obvious when discussions appear to be a strict narrative or opinion that cannot be addressed, by an alternative view point. With the high percentage of on-line learning classes going forward, these netiquette guidelines will be important for consistency reasons, from the students' and instructors' perspective.

Student Engagement throughout the Semester

Keeping Students Connected to You by Reaching Out

Another strategy I have used has been to use Starfish frequently and also connect with students through email. I have made a point to reach out to students to keep them up to date on their progress, both when they are doing well and when they are struggling. I also felt the need to be supportive and flexible for those students who were struggling but working very hard. I think utilizing Starfish and personally emailing students to "check in" with them helped many of them push through the semester. I thought this was important since not only are online courses challenging but the times we are living in are challenging right now and I just wanted to do everything I could to support my students' learning.

Tammy Tudryn, Early Childhood Education
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Keeping Students Connected Through Spotify Playlists

This semester I am trying out a class Spotify music playlist to encourage engagement and connection during the ongoing time away from campus. I made the playlist by creating a free public Spotify account (because no one needs to see how many NPR podcasts I'm streaming on my personal account) and added songs to my playlist related to my course material (songs such as Tom Leher's "The Elements" and "Why Does the Sun Shine?" by They Might Be Giants).

I've included a link to the playlist on our Blackboard page and told students to send me any songs they come across that are relevant to the course so I can add them to the playlist.

I have no idea how this will work out, but I had fun putting it together and it's a free resource that only requires an email address.

Heather Wemhoener, Biology
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Keeping Students on Track: Reminders, Shout-outs, and Suggestions

I post an Announcement at the beginning of each week. If you begin doing this, it is important to be consistent. In the Announcement I provide specific information related to the previous week and the upcoming week of the course. If the class did poorly on something or there were gaps, I point to them. I use the Discussion Board for most of the assignments and participation; so, I can also give "shout outs" to students who did really well. The shout outs serve two purposes: accolades for those who do well, but students who are struggling can also look at what really good work/participation looks like. I take this opportunity to explain/give suggestions for improvements as well as describe and remind students of what is due in the upcoming week.

NOTE: For weekly/recurring work, I don't remind them, but if a paper or project is due that week, I remind them.

Elle Van Dermark, History
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Keeping Students on Track: Table of Activities and Reminders

1. Create a table of weekly activities which includes due dates/points for them to reference
2. Set up a midweek reminder *and* an end of week reminder for assignments/due dates (these can be set up in BB to release on whatever date you choose) I chose Wednesday and Saturday
3. Use rubrics for assignments
4. Be flexible as this is not easy for them or us.

Tawana Jewell, Biology
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Keeping Students on Track: Reminders and Online Get Togethers

I believe the following things work with many students and help to keep them interested in the course:

1. I send a weekly class announcement on Saturday reminding students of what needs to be done the coming week.
2. I organize a Wednesday evening live get together in Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. I send a reminder on Tuesday. Attendance can be sparse, but those who participate enjoy it. I have invited guests to drop in and say hi.
3. I send a Thursday class email to remind students of the work due Sunday

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Assignments and Grading

Formative Assessments: Informal Online Quizzes, Tests, and Surveys

Quizizz - I have been using it in my LRON class. It is similar to Kahoot, if you have ever used that before, but I like it MUCH better. It's totally free, web-based, and works on phones. https://quizizz.com/admin

I use it for quick, formative assessments at the beginning or end of class. It is easy to create a quiz or survey, or you can combine the two. For example, I'll often include 2 or 3 content questions (multiple choice or short answer) and then also a poll question (ex: "this class is moving at a good pace for me" and then some choices) or an open ended question (ex: "Is there something I could be doing to make this class better for you?" or "How are you feeling about this chapter?")

MaryBeth Rajczewski, Math
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Resource: Getting Feedback from Students

You can combine Quizizz and MaryBeth's suggestions with any number of **Classroom Assessment Techniques** to get feedback from your students at any point in your course about what they are struggling with, what is helping them, what they think they need more of, or any number of things related to their learning or your course. You can find ten quick suggestions on getting feedback from students here. You can access a compendium of Classroom Assessment Techniques and how to use them through the link above or through the Asnuntuck Center for Teaching website.

Grades: Sharing Projected Course Grades with Students in Blackboard

I like to make two calculated "final grade" columns visible to students in Blackboard. I create them exactly the same, except one has "Calculate as Running Total" checked and one does not. The Running Total [YES] column is labeled "FINAL GRADE (PREDICTED)" and the Running Total [No] column is labeled "FINAL GRADE (IF YOU STOPPED NOW)".The "IF YOU STOPPED NOW" grade starts off at F for everybody, but then it becomes the grade to look for at the end of the semester when they're trying to decide what they have to do before the class is over. This set of calculations won't work for everyone, but it's something to try.

Laurie Chancey, Sociology
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LRON Teaching Tips (Online Classes with Live Component)

LRON Live Class Sessions: Cell Phones and Other Distractions

When I'm teaching in person, I usually start my class by asking students to put their cell phones away. (I know, not everyone believes in doing that.) Because there are even more distractions when students are at home looking at a screen than there are in an on-ground class, before I start an LRON class session, I ask them to please put their phones on "do not disturb" and close out of email, social media, the news, and any other websites or other distractions. They actually listen! In fact, when I had them fill out a "Getting to know you" questionnaire, several of them asked that I please help them stay focused. This is one way I'm helping them stay focused, and they understand that.

Luisa Caycedo-Kimura, English
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LRON Live Class Sessions: Your Teaching Space

I have one little tip that's helped immensely, and that has to do with my teaching space. I route my laptop (at one end of a room) through my TV and then I've got an old iPhone which I sign into another Zoom account (I know we're supposed to use not Zoom, but... you know... Zoom is the best one) as a second camera angle that students see me on so I can walk the room like I do the classroom. Behind me (behind the laptop setup) I've used NuWallaper to make a wall a whiteboard wall.

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LRON Live Class Sessions: Begin Class with a Question

When meeting in person, I like to start every class with a room-around question. I start at different points in the room so the same person doesn't always go first. This works especially well to help those students who aren't quite as comfortable speaking up get accustomed to speaking. Surprisingly, this has worked even better during video conferencing. I start each LRON live class meeting with a screen-around question. The questions can range from something as simple as "What is your favorite candy?" to something more substantive, such as "What is one thing you have learned in class so far?" or "What is one thing you liked (or found confusing) about the reading?" or "Do you prefer poetry, fiction, non-fiction, or drama?" I change the question each time, give them a few minutes to think about it, and ask them not to say the same exact thing as their classmates. If they want to say something similar, they need to change it up a bit and elaborate. I then try to somehow weave that into the lesson.

For the initial screen-around question (and sometimes during regular class discussions, if applicable) I ask the student who responds to a question to then choose who will be the next person to answer the question. They seem to be more comfortable having one of their classmates pick them, rather than having the instructor call on them, plus, it feels like they are getting some student-to-student interaction, which they are craving in online classes.

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Resource: Getting Students to Ask Questions

Luisa's idea is similar to what's sometimes called "Question Roulette," which can be adapted for live sessions of online courses and done at any point in the lesson. You can read more about it here.

LRON Live Class Sessions: Have a Backup Plan for Your Live Class Session Platform

I suggest having an alternate meeting platform for online class sessions (like LRON courses). Whatever your primary platform is (i.e. Collaborate Ultra, WebEx, or Zoom), let the class know your alternate platform at the beginning of the semester and perhaps have them all practice accessing it early in the course, just in case. Make it clear that if for some reason your normal online meeting platform is unavailable, you will inform the class and shift class to the alternate platform. It also helps to have gathered students' personal email addresses as part of your Blackup plan, since they may not be able to access their college e-mail accounts (or Blackboard or Collaborate Ultra) if Commnet is down.

Nick Lefakis, Accounting
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Saving Faculty Time

Saving Faculty Time: Save and Paste Common Discussion Board Feedback

Discussion forums and prompts on Blackboard Learn are a terrific way to engage students, but the time required to answer each student with relevant feedback can be overwhelming. A way I have saved time is to use the dictation feature on my Mac to develop responses in a word document that I then cut and paste into the thread. It tends to save time and keystrokes, and the responses are often better – more colloquial when I can hear myself say them aloud. Frankly the act of responding to posts feels less cumbersome, and a bit more fun to deliver – which is a small little victory in this whole process. I'm sure there is a similar technology available on the Windows platform as well.

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Saving Faculty Time: Student Questions

Create a course questions discussion forum and encourage students to post any questions they have about the course to it. This minimizes the amount of individual student emails that an instructor receives. Also, once you answer a question for one, it is there for all to see. Individual emails can get lost… I explain that the discussion forum can be used for anything you would raise your hand for in class, while individual emails is used for anything personal like grades.

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Saving Faculty Time: Grading Feedback Bank

Students are individuals, and so their work in our courses often deserves individualized feedback. But, let's be honest, how often do you find yourself typing the exact same feedback to several different students? If you think about it, you could probably type a list of the "Top 10" pieces of feedback that you will end up typing to students when you grade a given assignment—that is, the top 10 things that you know many students will need clarity and guidance on. Save yourself the time and trouble of typing them over and over. Create a "Grading Feedback Bank" organized with section labels, so you can find the feedback

you're looking for quickly when you're grading. Since you're only typing each of the most common ones once now, you have the time and energy to elaborate a little: give students several good sentences of quality feedback specific to assignment requirement that you're giving them feedback on. Don't make the feedback so intricate that it won't apply to a large number of students (you can type more specific details at the end of it for each individual student who receives it). You know what to say—you've likely typed it dozens of times to other students.

Save your Grading Feedback Bank and have it open as you grade student assignments. Copy and paste the appropriate feedback to students as needed. And any feedback tailored that each specific student as needed. You're not being lazy and you're not selling your students short: you're perfecting and targeting the written feedback you give them and you're saving your time and energy for when more individual, tailored feedback is required.

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For more teaching tips, resources, guidebooks, system-wide teaching events, and information about becoming involved in the Instructional Excellence Committee, visit the Asnuntuck Community College's Center for Teaching website at
https://asnuntuck.edu/for-faculty-staff/center-for-teaching/

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