

20 Easy Tips for Improving Student Motivation, Success, and Retention in Online Courses

Developed by Robin Dewald, Excelsior College
and provided for the TLT Group's *FridayLive!* Session - December 10, 2014

Begin the course with a bang:

1. Provide a powerful and lasting first impression with a personal welcome to each student..
2. Provide the tools necessary for success right at the beginning of each course.
3. Be open and friendly, share experiences
4. Be approachable. Reveal your human side (some examples include communicating in a friendly tone of voice, using students' first name in all communications and responses to discussions, using humor, asking questions, and adding small doses of personal experiences and information).
5. Let students know your availability and contact information right from the start of the course.
6. Use video, avatars, or podcasts to create a “face-to-face” feeling for students.

Maintain presence throughout the course:

7. Decrease the social-psychological distance that some students equate with distance education
 - ✓ Use your students first names in all communications, responses to discussions
 - ✓ Ask questions and then respond to the answers in a timely manner
 - ✓ Respond to conversations of groups of learners
 - ✓ Make connections between and among learners thoughts
 - ✓ Share small doses of personal experiences and information examples from your to acknowledge learners grasp of the content, or to redirect when necessary. It is important to keep these small, the learning is about them and their experience, not yours.
 - ✓ Avoid belittling comments
 - ✓ Avoid slang
 - ✓ Story telling is a great tool
8. Send motivational e-mails to students regularly. These personal messages are positive in tone, goal oriented, focused on general words of encouragement. If you want to send the same message to all of the students, you can send a message to yourself and then blind copy (BCC) all of the students. They will think you sent it just to one at a time. If you send a group message, it takes away the personalization element.
9. Use announcements to remind learners of upcoming work, to summarize the previous week's discussion or module, for encouragement, or to draw in current events related to the content.
10. Answer all questions in a timely manner.
11. Tie content to what is happening in students' lives and with the world. Make the content relevant to their learning needs.
12. Ask questions that foster thinking and communication.
13. Connect students 'conversations within the discussions, creating a sense of community.



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14. Use images, video, or other enhancements to connect content for the variety of learner preferences.
15. Lighten the load with tasteful humor and fun images.
16. Set the students up for success. Provide explicit instructions for assignments. Ambiguity leads to frustration. Adults enjoy a challenge. However, when the challenge is too much, it becomes frustration, which leads to dissatisfaction.

Provide Feedback:

17. Provide meaningful and timely feedback: Learners' greatest need is to have an interpersonal connection with their instructor. The connection is respectful, positive, and encouraging. When used correctly, feedback can improve the learner-teacher connection and enhance student achievement.
18. Feedback: Students depend on your interaction, comments, suggestions, encouragement, and redirection. Students are looking to you for feedback. They need this feedback frequently, and consistently. This feedback, when done well, increases the amount of student-teacher interaction, shows that you care about the students' learning, encourages achievement, significantly improves satisfaction with online learning, and promotes students' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an essential element of student success in online courses.
19. Effective feedback is
 - ✓ Standards based (based on learning outcomes)
 - ✓ Specific (concrete examples)
 - ✓ Instructional (explain what is correct and what needs improvement)
 - ✓ Actionable (provide tools for improvement)
 - ✓ Positive (upbeat, based on self-efficacy and encouragement)
 - ✓ Timely (leads to improvement for next evaluation)
 - ✓ Respectful (use I statements rather than you)
20. Use audio-feedback or podcasting to enhance the face-to-face humanizing feel for feedback.

