

# Teaching Online Effective Practices

## Top 10 List

### 1. Be present and actively involved in your course.

Students have said that the best online instructors are the ones that are actively involved with their class. Whether it be multiple times a week or even daily, using communication tools such as the discussion boards or announcements will help make the student feel as if they weren't abandoned. Also, consider "meeting" either by phone or virtual classroom with your students individually at least once during the term. This gives students the feeling that you care about their learning and will set aside time to work with them individually.

### 2. Make student learning goals and paths to them clear.

Give your students an understandable and logical way to access and use course content and resources. Be sure to state the learning objectives in the syllabus, and give a timeline for meeting the objectives.

### 3. Let students do (most of) the work.

Bill Pelz, a Professor of Psychology at Herkimer County Community College, asserts "the more quality time students spend engaged in content, the more of that content they learn." You can reinforce this by letting students lead online discussions as well as finding and discussing their own online resources. A Wiki can be a good tool to have students discuss online resources.

### 4. Organization is essential.

Distance education students often choose to take an online course because they assume it will provide more flexibility for their busy schedules. They will need to know what is expected of them so that they can organize their time to meet course requirements. This increased time management responsibility of the learner also means that there is an increased organization responsibility on the instructor. Be sure to prepare syllabus and assignment due dates carefully and well in advance so that students know what to expect and when.

### 5. Use both synchronous and asynchronous activities

Be sure to provide a balance of activities. Engage learners in more collaborative and more reflective activities. Activities that include real-time interactive brainstorming and sharing are often as effective as activities that require students to think, plan, write and summarize.

6. **Create Discussion Board Topics that Invite Questions, Discussions, Reflections and Responses.**

Discussion boards encourage critical or creative thinking and support students in their own reflections and inquiries. Boards also allow students to get to know each other personally and intellectually. Try creating open-ended questions that students can explore and apply the concepts that they are learning.

7. **Don't overload your students with material.**

One big problem that most online courses have is they aren't broken down into manageable pieces known as chunking. If you deliver (for example) four hours worth of content in one sitting you have to work very hard to get the learner to be willing to accept your attempts to reinforce the material. By breaking up the online course into smaller, separate modules- you make it easier for students to retain knowledge and pay better attention to your lesson.

8. **Talk with your learners instead of at them.**

When teaching an online course it is important to have a good deal of contact with your students. They should hear from you at least every other day or two until they have completed each of the modules in the course. Ask them to contact you directly if they have any questions. Even if you don't think you can answer their questions, assure them that you can find somebody that will. A good rule of thumb for online student interaction is that the amount of time you spend communicating with the learners should equal the amount of time you would have been in the classroom.

9. **Provide constant feedback.**

Online courses can make learners feel very isolated, so be sure to provide your learners with increased feedback. Feedback should not be limited to just private email messages to your students, but if you employ the forum or message board approach you should also praise students that are making insightful comments.

10. **Ask for Informal Feedback Early in the Term or Semester.**

Early feedback surveys or informal discussions are effective in getting students to provide feedback on what is working well in a course and solicit suggestions and ideas on what might help them have a better course experience. A request for informal feedback is an easy opening for students who might have comments, suggestions, or questions. The Survey tool in Blackboard can be used to request the feedback and it has an advantage for students - responses are anonymous.