Tips for Introducing Students to the Technology

⇒ Let students know exactly what the minimum hardware requirements are in order to be able to access and use your course site.

⇒ Set realistic performance expectations.

⇒ Prepare simple, easy-to-follow directions on how to use the technology.

⇒ Emphasize that everyone has to start somewhere and mistakes will be made.

⇒ Forewarn students about potential technical difficulties such as server malfunctions, and the effect that one server going down has on another, network outages, machine problems, and slowdowns due to heavy network traffic.

⇒ Prepare explicit directions on turning in materials to you electronically, how and when to participate in pre-scheduled online chats, and how and where to access grades or assignments.

⇒ Encourage students to ask questions and alert you to any technical problems they are experiencing, or any problems they're having in trying to get technical help.

⇒ Provide multiple options for obtaining technical assistance such as trained, technologically literate teaching assistants or the help desk.

⇒ Make sure all students are using the technology. Follow up individually with those who aren't participating to determine what problems they may be experiencing.

Facilitating Interaction (cont'd)

» **Discussions** – prompt frequently and occasionally summarize the discussion, especially if it is long. If you have not heard from someone in a while, use private messages to urge them to participate

» **Questions** – encourage students to answer each other's questions.

» **Chat** – if you are using chat, provide transcripts for students who are unable to attend.

» **Flexibility** – in submitting work, accommodating technology failures, accommodating unforeseeable problems.

» **Objectives** – clearly state your objectives and provide simple, easy-to-follow directions about expectations and how to use the electronic tools you have chosen.

» **Experts** – to provide interest and stimulate new conversational threads, invite visiting experts to join the conference and give presentations on specific topics.

» **Groups** – to get students interacting as a group, divide them into small work groups and have them address specific topics and questions together.

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Office of Distance Learning and Instructional Technologies

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A Survival Guide to Teaching Online

Once you have your course site developed, the fun begins! This section contains timely information to help you implement your course site and anticipate possible challenges. Hopefully, you've developed all your content by now, but you need to continue engaging students in the course site, especially if you are teaching a fully-online course. You need to have a regular presence so students feel there is someone on the other end.

Tips for the First Day(s) of Class

1. **Welcome the class.** Post a general "Welcome" announcement including how to get started in the class (e.g., read the syllabus and first unit) in addition to creating a discussion forum for "Class Introductions". You can post a more thoughtful and complete welcome message to the class in the discussion board which may sound repetitive but consider this as an opportunity to humanize yourself in an online course as well as setting a tone for the class.

Teaching Online

2. **Finalize Content.** Aside from the syllabus, you should strive to have all major assignments, grading schemes, samples, readings, unit commentary, etc., posted for students (you don't want to be writing the course and teaching it at the same time). Once enrollments are loaded, any content released to students will be accessible as soon as they login to your course site. You may opt to date-release certain content (vigilantly check your dates for accuracy) but make sure everything loaded onto Blackboard is otherwise complete, accurate, and finalized.

3. **Check your links.** It's a good policy before the course goes "live" to click around and make sure all your external (and internal for that matter) links are active and go the intended destination. Especially if you are teaching a course developed in previous semesters, taking some time to do a little quality assurance is well worth the effort.

4. **Videos.** Online classes may use videos to deliver a presentation or "lecture" recorded from your computer. Best practice suggests keeping your presentation to less than 7 minutes, focusing on narrowly defined learning objectives.

5. **Setup the Discussion Board.** Aside from an introductions forum, you must setup discussion forums in which the students may communicate. Most folks add one forum per lesson/ unit/module in addition to, for example, General Course Questions, Coffee House, or Current Events. This setup extends to private groups…

6. **Private Groups.** If you're dividing your students into small discussion groups, now's the time to create the groups and add those discussion forums. You can have Blackboard to automatically/randomly assign group membership.

7. **Setup "Assignments".** These are the items using the Blackboard Assignment Manager facilitating student submission of files for grading. This tool works beautifully for student submitted papers, journals, forms, and such. Lots of step-by-step documentation is online.

8. **Finalize your Grade Center.** It's a good idea to go ahead and setup columns for each of the graded assignments in the course before the course begins (note: quizzes and Assignment Manager items automatically receive a column; but for anything else, such as Participation, create a column).

9. **UNTD E-Mail or Bb Mail?** The "E-Mail" tool sends messages out to a student's UNTD account and your account. "Messages", which we call Bb-Mail, is more akin to an internal e-mail system where messages reside within your Blackboard course site. Whichever tool you opt to use, add a button to the course navigation menu and make sure the other tool is not available (to avoid confusion).

10. **Blogs, Journals, and Wikis.** Blogs are great for student journaling; wikis are collectively editable pages great for student group reports/ projects.

11. **Self Reflection using QM.** Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty-centered review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and components. They developed a rubric [PDF] which we use to encourage self-reflection on your course. Once you've taught your course, you may request peer feedback through our Quality Course Peer Review service.

12. **Keep up a "presence".** Particularly over the first few weeks, you'll want to login to the course more often to show students a real presence. You certainly don't need to respond to every single student posting but I would skim through them and post summative comments and observations fairly regularly.

13. **Track Your Students.** In the Control Panel under Evaluation there is a link for the Performance Dashboard. Once students are loaded, this gives you simple tracking data on your students and in the first few weeks of class, this can be critical to establishing that students are accessing the course site and engaged in the course.

Facilitating Interaction

It's important to set the climate of the learning experience. Welcome each student to the course, forewarn students about your performance expectations, which should be specific about management issues for both you and the students. It's important to know up-front that initially you may spend more time interacting with students. Some students will thrive using these tools, while others will struggle and need reassurance. Communicate information about:

» **Time limits** – for time on task, group interaction completion, and how soon you will give them feedback, etc.

» **Standards for Success** – your rubric for judging project completion, appropriate participation, and grading (balancing both final product and individual participation)

» **Participation** – if you want students to contribute, you should require regular participation.

» **Introductions** – have students introduce themselves at the start of class.