

Tips for Online Teaching

- ☑ **Be consistent** – Consistency with days of the week that things open, are due or close helps students establish a rhythm for the course. Consistency in where you put similar types of information helps students find what they need.
- ☑ **Accumulate student tips** – Gather tips for success from students, at the end of the course, to share with the next class. One way to do this is to create a forum asking students to post their tips for peers taking the course next semester, and be sure and ask students to confirm their permission to use their tips. You could list these tips in a special section of your syllabus or in a locked forum (open for viewing only) at the beginning of your course. Give it a catchy title to draw attention to it (e.g. Advice Alley, Wisdom Wall, Word to the Wise, How I Passed this Class: Student tips, etc.)
- ☑ **Use your design eye when formatting the syllabus** – We all tend to pay more attention to things that are inviting visually. Take time to make the syllabus look attractive, or at the least organized and uncluttered. Some tricks include using bulleted lists to organize list based information, including enough white-space between things so it doesn't appear as one big block of text, use a nicely formatted table to layout your course schedule, and even a small picture or two to draw interest and break up monotony.
- ☑ **Get a guinea pig** – Have someone (son, daughter, niece, colleague, etc.) test your course out before students use it, to make sure instructions are clear, to work out any bugs, or to find the small details you may have missed.
- ☑ **Provide rubrics and/or model papers** – Let students know what you expect to see in an exemplary assignment by providing grading rubrics or an example of an exemplary assignment. Moodle makes it easy to add a rubric to your assignments.
- ☑ **Plan for technical help** – On high-stakes exams or papers, try to have your due date fall within a date and time in which there is someone on campus to provide technical assistance. The 24 hour help-desk is great, but occasionally there are problems that they can't resolve and need to be forwarded to college staff.
- ☑ **Make small edits to course each term** – If you get the same question more than twice, fix it in your design for next term.
- ☑ **Fix discussion posts** – When a student posts in the wrong location, move the post. Likewise, if a student does not title their post in a way that makes it useful, edit the subject line to make it useful for others. Of course, monitor the discussion for inappropriate use and fix those problems as well. Notify students privately of your changes. Refrain from making a problem post a public discussion--keep it private.
- ☑ **Break the class up into smaller groups for discussions** – Large discussions are overwhelming for students to read through, and it can be difficult for later posters to contribute something unique. Try offering options for discussion topics, and let the class break up into smaller groups naturally.
- ☑ **Make discussion analysis an assignment** – To encourage better discussion dialogue and ensure that students are reading posts, give an assignment where students analyze the discussion. They might summarize what was said, or identify the post that they felt

did the best job in discussing the topic. You might have them analyze their own post, stating what they liked or didn't like about it. How might they improve their post, etc.

- ☑ **Summarize discussions.** At the conclusion of a discussion, summarize by reintroducing the topic and highlighting what has been said, tying in the ideas with what you want students to understand about the subject. Of course, in order to get students to read a closed discussion you may decide not to put the summary in the closed discussion, but instead put it at the beginning of the new week's lecture.
- ☑ **Provide for relaxation in the class site** – Include a lounge area in your discussion board and post to it on occasion. It helps students get to know you as a person, and not just a teacher. You will need to decide the level of informality that you are comfortable with, however. It is a personal decision. (Example: You post to the lounge that you plan to go to the movies and ask them for advice on what movie to see.)
- ☑ **Let class decide discussion rules** – As part of the first discussion, type your own short list of rules for discussion posting and ask students to contribute to the list. Do they think the list is fair, and complete? As the instructor you always hold the trump card, but be open to their suggestions. Asking for their input helps build a sense of ownership in the course for students.
- ☑ **Participate in the class discussions** – It's not necessary to respond to every post, but respond where appropriate. For example you might want to give praise for an outstanding post, ask for clarification on an incomplete post, or politely correct erroneous information, etc. If you do have an introduction assignment, it is generally a good idea to welcome students as they introduce themselves. Suggestion: In large classes you may not want to reply to each individual introduction, but you could combine your replies by waiting for two or three posts and say "Welcome Maria, Robert, and Nancy! I'm looking forward to getting to know each of you in this course...".
- ☑ **Prizes instead of points** – Give virtual cash awards to students for things you want to encourage but don't want to assign points for. For example, you could award a virtual dollar for each time a student provides a helpful answer to a student with a question posted to the Questions forum. At the end of the course students can cash in their virtual dollars at the class store. You could get gift certificates or other things donated to you from local businesses for this.
- ☑ **Ask students what they expect from you** – It can be helpful to get it clear from the start what students expect from you. Sometimes their expectations are manageable and other times they may be unfeasible. You could set up a forum at the beginning of the course in which you elicit feedback from students on what they expect from you during the class. Respond to their expectations letting them know how you can or cannot accommodate their expectations.
- ☑ **Practice group project** – When you require group work, start the groups out with a practice project that is non-threatening and familiar. For example, you might have them plan a party or get-together. Although it isn't necessary that the get-together actually take place it would add some value if it could.
- ☑ **Show excitement when mentioning group work** – Excitement as well as boredom are contagious. Make the group activity sound exciting. Let students know that it might take a little extra effort, but your experience with past classes shows that students enjoy their group work and get a lot out of it. Also, let them know why they are required to do group work. How will the activity help them when they get out in the real-world?