

10 Tips for Quality Teaching Online

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Key Design Tips

TIP 1: Be Present & Visible Online

Research and end of term evaluations show that faculty who regularly update their announcements, send email reminders and provide detailed and consistent grading feedback develop a stronger online learning community.

- Meet Live
Set up regular times when you can meet in a [Blackboard Collaborate Ultra](#) live office hour time, respond quickly to email and voicemail - these connections can be invaluable to students.
- Turn on your Webcam
Don't be afraid to turn on that web camera and record a few of your video lectures/announcements with yourself on camera. Students appreciate "seeing" their instructor and knowing there is a "real" person teaching their course.
- Create a Welcome Video with [Panopto](#)
Consider making and posting a video introduction about yourself, your interests and upcoming highlights for your specific course. Should you need help getting started with video creation or exploring additional ideas for creating instructor presence, don't hesitate to reach out to our [instructional designers, digital media developers and eLearning specialists](#).

TIP 2: Build a Supportive Online Course Community

If you have participated in our [GVSU Foundations of Online & Hybrid Course Development training](#), you will have learned about the [Community of Inquiry Model](#) and the importance of designing your course so that there are equal opportunities for faculty to student interaction, student to student interaction and student to content interaction.

- Faculty to student interaction can include things like video announcements, weekly reminders, audio podcasts, and detailed grading feedback.
- Student to student interaction includes opportunities for personal introductions, discussion board forums for casual dialogue and posting of course questions, as well as small/large group discussion and opportunities for peer review and feedback.

TIP 3: Share Communication and Course Expectations

Ensure you and your students are on the same page. Be sure to inform your students about: 1) how you will communicate with them and 2) how much time students should be expected to be working on the course each week. Include on your Blackboard course site and within your syllabus a set of expectations for how students can communicate you and have dialogue with other students online.

- Be clear as to how much effort and time will be required on a weekly basis keeps surprises to a minimum. Include recommendations for regular check-ins to the course and the number of times they should expect to be "online".
- Ask your students to communicate regularly with you if they are experiencing issues or have questions about course content, assignments and requirements.

- At the start of the course, ask students to review the [GVSU Online Website](#) and complete the [Online Learning Student Readiness Quiz](#).
- During your first week, provide students with an orientation for your course, create a syllabus quiz and award points for completion.

TIP 4: Use a Course Design Standard but Include Variety

Carefully review your course content a standard course design and weekly format is helpful to encourage students to develop a routine and easily navigate your Blackboard site to find materials. Also, use a variety of large group, small group, and individual work experiences. Learning works best when there are a variety of activities and experiences. Equally so, online courses can be more enjoyable and effective when students have the opportunity to brainstorm and work through concepts and assignments with peers.

- Consider using [Open Educational Resources](#) in your course for content. OER resources are no or low cost, allow you to remix and share, and give valuable options for flexibility. In addition, OER resources are available to students electronically and remove barriers of access.
- Carefully consider which assignments might lend themselves to group or peer experiences and don't hesitate to ask for assistance from the [GVSU instructional designers](#) about pedagogical approaches and appropriate technology to support groupwork.

TIP 5: Be Regular and Substantive - Using both Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities

Online and hybrid courses at GVSU are not self-paced “correspondence courses”, and [federal regulations](#) in fact require “regular and substantive” faculty and student interactions. Regular asynchronous learning activities and communication through group work and discussion boards keep students engaged. In addition, there is nothing better than “live” office hours, interactive brainstorming, and discussion. Although it may not always be possible to schedule a required synchronous activity, you might find your students appreciate having [Blackboard Collaborate Ultra](#) available for groupwork and individual faculty consultations.

- Regular and substantive interaction between a student and an instructor is an integral part of the educational process. Faculty-initiated and student-initiated interaction provide help to ensure students are engaging with academic activities (quiz, test, paper, or online discussion).

Tip 6: Early in the Semester - Ask for Feedback

Midterm surveys or just informal discussions asking students to provide feedback on what is working well in a course can provide critical insight on what's really happening and what changes can be made to the course before it's too late.

- Use [Blackboard anonymous surveys](#) or Google surveys to collect information. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance from the [GVSU instructional designers](#) in regard to sample survey questions and technical assistance.
- Sample questions: It was easy for me to navigate through course content., I felt that content was presented using a variety of media (e.g., text, visual, audio) that were appropriate to the learning goals and subject., I found that the instructional strategies (course activities, types of content presented, etc.) helped me reach course goals and objectives., It was clear to me how I was to use course content to achieve the stated learning outcomes., The tools available within Blackboard were used in ways that enhanced my learning., My instructor took an active role in facilitating and moderating discussions, including providing feedback to students. See “[Getting Feedback from your Students](#)” on the IDeL website for example questions from the Blackboard Exemplary Course Program.

TIP 7: Prepare Discussion Posts that Invite Questions, Discussions, Reflections and Responses

When designing your [Blackboard discussion board](#) postings, be sure to create open-ended questions that learners can explore and apply the concepts that they are learning. Make sure to also stagger due dates of the responses and consider mid-point summary and /or encouraging comments.

- Within your syllabus, provide guidelines and instruction on what you “expect” when responding to other students. For example, suggest a two-part response: (A) what you liked or agreed with or what resonated with you, and (B) a follow-up question such as what you are wondering about or curious about, etc.
- Share a rubric with your students as to how they will be assessed on their assignment and discussion board activities.

TIP 8: Integrate Current Events and Examples into your Course

Students enjoy seeing the “real-world” relevance and application of what they are learning and how that links to current real world application and events.

- When possible, build in opportunities throughout your online discussions and provide links to current events in your weekly announcements.
- Enlist student assistance in identifying content that is available online and posting those resources in the discussion board to be used in future semesters.
- Don’t forget to ask your [GVSU library liaison](#) to help you identify new resources, including streaming videos, that can supplement your course readings and existing web resources.

TIP 9: Encourage Student-Centered Learning

[Discussion board forums](#), [Bb Blogs](#), [Bb Journals](#) and group work are all excellent strategies for engaging learners in clarifying, identifying and application of course concepts with real-world experiences. In addition, find opportunities for students to explore and expand their own learning capabilities.

- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it.
- Give students voice and choice about which assignments they complete - and how. This is a good principle of [Universal Design for Learning](#). This might even include allowing students to create course content, classroom policies, establish assignment deadlines within a given time window, and opportunities to create assessment criteria.

TIP 10: Plan a Closing and Wrap-up Activity for your Course

Starting the course on a positive note and ending the semester strong are equally important. We all know that online students are juggling academics, their personal life, and work obligations. So, by the end of the semester they are often tired, stressed, and sometimes overwhelmed.

- Take the time to share five things you’ll remember about your course and one thing about teaching you’ve learned from these students, and be sure to share those positive reflections with your students. Post as an Announcement or send as Email to the students to share with them your reflections.
- Ask your students to reflect upon their learning throughout the semester in an anonymous Blackboard survey or Google form.
- While it’s still fresh in your mind, make notes on things you will change next time you teach the course. You can even create a folder or items in your Blackboard site that are hidden from students as reminders for yourself.
- Ask yourself... How did your relationship with your course begin, evolve and end? What was new, different and exciting about the content? Did you teach well? Did students learn what you set out for them to learn? If you could change one thing about your teaching and their learning next semester, what would it be?

