

Best practices for developing and delivering online instruction at the University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Welcome statement

University teaching and learning is no longer confined to the physical classroom. Faculty and students can now connect and engage in learning conversations through a variety of Internet communications technologies, such as Online@UT (Canvas) and LiveOnline@UT (Zoom). While the spaces in which learning takes place may look different, there are some fundamental best practices for supporting learning in online environments. This guide was developed by faculty, staff and students at UT, including members of the UT Learning Consortium, the Office of Information Technology / Instructional Support, and the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center, with the purpose of providing guidance to faculty offering online instruction.

Purpose of the guide

This guide provides a checklist of best practices which can be used by faculty to self-assess the quality of their online instruction. It can also be used for a peer-evaluation of your course by a colleague. It can be used by units and departments as they begin to develop online instruction, courses, and programs. Following the checklist, there is a glossary and a list of additional resources.

Peer/self-review checklist

Course Name: _____

Instructor: _____

Peer reviewer (if applicable): _____

Date reviewed: _____

Asynchronous Course Delivery (Online@UT)

Course Introduction

Student Information

NW A X N/A

There is a welcome statement in the Online@UT course site from the instructor that includes clear instructions on how to get started and where to find various course components.

The instructor provides a brief biography, photograph, and an appropriate self-introduction, which presents the instructor as approachable and engaging.

The course contains specific instructor contact information (phone, email, instant messenger (IM), Skype, office hours).

The course includes tips for being a successful online student.

<http://oit.utk.edu/teachingtools/online/resources/10-tips-for-success/>

Expectations for course participation are clearly stated.

For example:

Students are expected to participate in activities as described in the course syllabus, including online discussions, working in small groups, and completing all the course readings. Check your e-mail and Online@UT (Canvas) daily for official communication. Assignments must be submitted electronically by the due date, following the directions provided. Please communicate any issues to the instructor before the due date.

Functionality

The layout of course is visually and functionally consistent (e.g. content is organized by day or by week, etc. in a similar manner).

All of the hyperlinks work and point to up-to-date information.

<http://brokenlinkcheck.com/broken-links.php>

The course uses appropriate formatting (font size, font type, color, contrast, etc.) to maximize readability (e.g. black Times Roman 12- point for printed material and a paragraph font style in Canvas).

Accessibility

NW A X N/A

The course provides a statement telling students how to access ADA services on their campus.

Syllabus Disability Statement:

<http://ods.utk.edu/frequently-asked-questions/>

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of

Disability Services (ODS) at 865-974-6087 in 100 Dunford Hall to document his or her eligibility for services. ODS will work with students and faculty to coordinate accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Following the university's Accessibility Policy, the course uses accessible information, materials and technologies.

Comments:

Learner Support

Technology

NW A X N/A

A statement describes the technical skills required of the student for successful course completion.

<http://oit.utk.edu/instructional/strategies/online-tech-skills/>

There are instructions on how and where to receive technical assistance. <http://oit.utk.edu/help>

Information is included on how to use Online@UT (and LiveOnline@UT, if appropriate).

<http://oit.utk.edu/teachingtools/online/> and <http://oit.utk.edu/teachingtools/liveonline/>

Information/tutorials on how to use software required by class assignments is included.

<http://oit.utk.edu/lynda>
<http://oit.utk.edu/training/>
<http://oit.utk.edu/training/online-training/microsoft>

A link is provided for common computer troubleshooting tips.

<http://help.utk.edu/kb/>

Tips are included for avoiding and dealing with computer viruses.

<http://antivirus.utk.edu>

Information is included on where assignments can be completed.

Computer Labs, Software lists

<http://oit.utk.edu/labs/>

The Studio

<http://www.lib.utk.edu/studio/>

Library and Commons Resources

Consider copyright. For guidance on fair use and how it relates to course materials, consult Copyright Information from UT Libraries. <http://www.lib.utk.edu/copyright/>

Links to articles and other electronic materials available through the UT Libraries will work on or off campus. For a demonstration on placing online resources from UT Libraries into Online@UT, click here:

<http://libguides.utk.edu/teachingresources/>

Steps have been taken to ensure access to library materials used in the course. Examples include:

- Library owns or provides access to specific materials
- Print materials are placed on Reserve to provide access to all students in the course
- Materials have been digitized or linked within Online@UT

Library or research assignments are based on current library offerings and services. Librarians are available to help construct library assignments to fit your course needs. Use this form to request assistance with a library assignment:

<http://www.lib.utk.edu/instruction/request.html>

Instructions for locating and using library materials, both print and electronic, are provided.

UT Libraries Gateway to Resources
<http://www.lib.utk.edu/>

Databases by Subject
<http://www.lib.utk.edu/databases/>

Library Tutorials page
<http://www.lib.utk.edu/instruct/tutorials/>

Research assistance instructions are included with library assignments. Research assistance is available by phone, instant messenger, email, and in-person through UT Libraries' AskUsNow! Service,

<http://www.lib.utk.edu/askusnow/>.

Librarians provide in-depth, discipline-specific research assistance.

<http://www.lib.utk.edu/askusnow/subject-librarians/>

Code: NW: Needs Work A: Acceptable X: Excellent N/A: Not Applicable

Guidelines for formatting papers and citations with links to style manuals and tools are provided.

Citation guide, style manuals, and citation tools

<http://libguides.utk.edu/style>

Plagiarism tutorial:

Citing Your Sources and Creative Works

<http://youtu.be/3ugFjnlTQss/>

Comments:

Instructional Design & Delivery

NW A X N/A

The syllabus is easily located and provides complete and clear information on course objectives, course structure, grading, instructor contact information, required materials, and any other course policies. See TNTLC syllabus guidelines here: <http://tenntlc.utk.edu/creating-a-syllabus/>

The learning objectives clearly state what the students will be able to do at the end of the course and are properly sequenced.

All written material is concise with no spelling errors.

Audio and video clips are generally short and relevant to course content. (NOTE: Long video should be segmented into clips.)

A variety of learning activities using different online tools are incorporated into the course (e.g., online discussion, synchronous meetings, email, podcasting, group projects).

Each course requirement/assignment includes the due date, instruction on how to submit it, and the estimated amount of time needed for completion.

Specific criteria are provided for the evaluation of student work and participation. (e.g. rubrics)

Self-checks or practice tests/assignments are provided to enable students to measure their own progress (e.g., completed examples or self-scoring practice tests).

The instructor provides clear expectations for student feedback of performance (assignments, tests).

For example:

I always send an email message to acknowledge receipt of your assignments. If you do not receive this message within 24 hours of submission, please e-mail me to verify receipt. My goal is to return assignments within one week of submission.

To provide feedback on your work, I use the "insert comment" feature of Word. If you have trouble seeing the comments, let me know.

It is a good idea to keep copies of your outgoing e-mail messages for future reference.

The course contains a formative evaluation soliciting student feedback regarding course quality.

**Learner engagement
(opportunities for interaction/collaboration,
communication & feedback protocols)**

Students are encouraged to introduce themselves to the class/instructor (e.g., e-mail, discussion board, or blog).

Learning activities promote achievement of stated learning objectives.

Learning activities foster instructor–student, student–student and student–content interaction.

Clearly defined statements inform students what to expect in terms of instructor role, availability and response time.

For example:

My goal is to respond to your e-mails within 24 hours. I am also available by Skype during the office hours described in the syllabus.

I will be participating in the weekly discussions as a facilitator, but I will not post a response to every post. On Monday or Tuesday, I synthesize the previous week's discussion and post it as a transitional piece from one week to the next. This synthesis, I hope, helps us see where we have been in our thought processes and where we are going next.

Course design prompts instructor to be active and engaged with students.

Instructor takes active role in moderating discussions and providing feedback.

Course design provides opportunity for students to reflect on the learning process.

Course design provides opportunities for student input to shape current and/or future offerings of the course as appropriate.

There is a deliberate attempt to create a learning community through activities and communication using the following:

- Web 2.0/synchronous (instant messenger/chat, whiteboards, videoconferencing/two-way audio-video), asynchronous (discussion boards, blogs, wikis, podcasts, e-mail), or social networking (Facebook, etc.) tools.
- Protocols that explain appropriate communication norms.

Regular participation in the weekly class discussions is an integral part of this course. You are expected to make substantial contributions to the discussion each week. It is vital for an interactive, dynamic discussion of the readings that you participate in both a timely manner and in a substantial manner.

Your initial contribution to the discussion should be made by Wednesday. This should be posted as a separate, individual response to the topic posed. You are then expected to participate in the discussion regularly throughout the week. Additional postings are due by Sunday. Our goal should be to make sure everyone in the class receives responses to their posts.

Grice's (1975) principle and maxims of conversation are also useful to keep in mind:

The principle of co-operation: Try to make your contribution one that supports the goal and purpose of the ongoing conversation.

1. **Maxim of quantity:** *Make your contribution as informative as is required, but give no more information than is required. (Sometimes overly long posts make it harder to have conversational dialogue.)*
2. **Maxim of quality:** *Try to make your contribution one that is true. Do not say anything that you believe is false or lacks adequate evidence. (In academic discourse, this is often accomplished by providing relevant citations to weekly readings or other published work.)*
3. **Maxim of relevance:** *Make your contribution relevant to the aims of the ongoing conversation. (Focus on the objectives and goals of that week's readings.)*
4. **Maxim of manner:** *Be clear. Try to avoid obscurity, ambiguity, wordiness. (Think of our discussions as conversations supported by evidence, but not as exercises in academic writing.) Be respectful of others.*

(From Grice, H. 1975. 'Logic and conversation'. In Speech Acts, edited by P. Cole, & Morgan, J. New York: Academic Press.)

Clearly stated expectations defining or explaining required levels of student participation.

Exemplary participation with substantial contributions are posts that go beyond simply agreeing with what others have said. Summarizing or reiterating main points can be helpful at times, but is not usually a substantial contribution. Making blanket generalizations about complex issues can often detract from, rather than add to, thoughtful discussions.

Rather we value a thoughtful critique of the issues at hand. Your contributions should always be evidence based – that is, supported by the class readings. Asking others for additional details about their position, presenting an opposing view, integrating diverse perspectives and applying ideas to a real world context – these are examples of substantial contributions to the discussion.

You will receive .5 each week if you make your initial post by Wednesday and another .5 for participating regularly throughout the week before Sunday's deadline.

In addition, you will receive the following points for quality (making a substantive contribution with your post):

- 1 pt: Exemplary participation with substantive contributions*
- .5 pt: Need to have stronger participation and/or contributions*
- 0 pt: Unacceptable level of participation and/or contributions*

Opportunities for students to interact with each other through group projects, teamwork, exchange of documents, discussions or other activities.

Comments

Synchronous Course Delivery (LiveOnline@UT)

Course Introduction

Student Information

NW A X N/A

The instructor greets students and establishes a virtual identity (shares a picture, uses a Webcam, states preferred name, verifies class and section name, etc.).

The instructor introduces co-presenters and/or GAs and shares details on his/her role in the classroom.

The instructor lists virtual office hours (through IM, Skype, or a Zoom meeting room) and preferred method of contact for questions outside of class.

Student expectations are stated clearly and included within the recording (verbally, shared document, slide, etc.).

The instructor states the policy for text chat use for the course (if necessary, ask for volunteers from participants to assist in monitoring the text chat for questions).

The instructor describes the nonverbal cues available to students in the online classroom.

Functionality

If the class is live, instructor begins class on time, records the class, ends class on time, and publishes (archives) the recording.

The course content is visible to all online students (verify with poll).

URLs, slide animation, and other course materials function correctly.

The instructor restates questions submitted via text chat (if applicable) into microphone to be included in the recording.

Accessibility

Interpreters have access to the course throughout the semester (attendance and playback).

Video capabilities are available where applicable.

Comments:

Learner Support

Technology

NW A X N/A

The instructor provides a time for students to practice logging into a session from the computer/network they will use to attend class. For Distance Education students, “test flights” are scheduled by OIT at the beginning of each semester. The instructor should communicate these dates to their students.

The instructor conducts sound check in beginning of class.

Technical support contact information is shared in class and spoken into microphone for recording (website: <http://liveonline.utk.edu>, and phone: 865-974-3117 or 1-877-974-3117).

Library and Commons Resources

If applicable, a statement regarding the Commons’ PC/Mac checkout option is available in the syllabus or other course materials for students to review.

Technical Information about Checkout Laptops

<http://www.lib.utk.edu/info/tech/>

Instructional Design and Delivery

The course content is a clear and cohesive presentation that may be followed by students viewing the course from a recording.

Learning objectives are stated clearly and recorded within the class session.

The course assignments are stated clearly with applicable due dates and recorded within the class session.

Learner Engagement

The instructor engages students by utilizing online classroom tools such as Share Screen, Annotation, Chat, Breakout Sessions, etc.

Classes of a duration of more than 90 minutes contain a break.

The instructor frequently engages students with polling questions and requests real-time feedback (verbal and nonverbal)

Comments: