Best Practices in Online Teaching - During Teaching - Introduction*

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Abstract

This module introduces a series of modules focused on strategies that instructors should consider when teaching in an online environment. This module is part of the Best Practices in Online Teaching Course created by Penn State University World Campus as a guide for faculty who are new to teaching in an online environment.

1 Introduction: Know your medium!

Online teaching is an art...just like oil painting, writing, or any other art.

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Figure 1: Artist Karl Leitzel at Work, Photo by Karl Leitzel, Penn State University, World Campus

*Oil paint is a mixture of pigments and certain kinds of oils, such as walnut oil, poppy seed oil, or others. One basic but important rule when applying oil paints is "fat over lean," which means you should use "oilier" paints for each extra layer to avoid cracking or peeling. Knowing the paint (the medium) helps you to master fine techniques in oil painting. ***

Likewise, when teaching online, one fundamental feature of the medium, the Internet, is that teaching and learning is done at a distance. As a result, many teaching and communication strategies seemingly not necessary in a face-to-face setting will now need to be spelled out to avoid miscommunication or confusion. Therefore, when teaching online, you'll need to know the characteristics of an online environment and attend to appropriate ways of communicating, interacting, motivating, and supporting your students. These elements in an online environment are certainly differently from those in a traditional face-to-face setting.

In this Section, we present strategic teaching steps:

- Promote Active Learning
- Model Effective Online Interaction
- Monitor Student Progress and Encourage Lagging Students
- Assess Messages in Online Discussion
- Sustain Students' Motivation

- Provide Feedback and Support
- Encourage Students to Regulate Their Own Learning
- Understand the Impact of Multiculturalism
- Deal with Conflicts Promptly
- Use Evaluation Data

NOTE: ** The information about oil painting is referenced from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_painting[1]

Exercise 1 ***(Solution on p. 4.)***
Is frequent instructor-initiated personal email the most important way to improve students' sense of community and learning experience in general?

Exercise 2 ***(Solution on p. 4.)***
Would content-directed online courses with less focus on collaboration and discussion affect the quality of learners' learning experience?

Exercise 3 ***(Solution on p. 4.)***
Many Course Management Systems (CMSs) generate reports about students' log-on activities and progress in the course. Would that be enough for me to assess students' participation in online discussions?

Exercise 4 ***(Solution on p. 4.)***
Will my participation in online discussion improve student engagement in the course discussions?

2 Activity

The dynamics of the online classroom can cause a shift in the role of the instructor. How would you characterize the role of the instructor in the online learning environment? List some of the characteristics of this role. How is this role different from the face-to-face environment? If you wish, post your comments to the discussion board for this page. You may wish to reference one or all of the following concepts as you consider the role of the instructor:

- Teacher-centered vs. Learner-centered learning environment
- Sage-on-the-stage vs. Facilitator-on-the-side
- Activity-rich vs. Media-rich online courses
- Online vs. Traditional face-to-face classroom
- New social and learning dynamics

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_painting

Solutions to Exercises in this Module

Solution to Exercise (p. 3)

No. Results from Woods' (2002) research study suggest that frequent delivery of personalized emails did not increase the amount of student participation in required class discussions; the study identified no significant differences between groups in perceived sense of community, satisfaction with learning experience, and personal relationship with the instructor.

Woods, R.H. (2002). How much communication is enough in online courses?–Exploring the relationship between frequency of instructor-initiated personal email and learners' perceptions of and participation in online learning. **International Journal of Instructional Media, 29(4)**, 377-394

Solution to Exercise (p. 3)

Yes. Even though learner-content interaction is described as the "defining characteristic of education" in Moore's (1989) Three Types of Interaction, content-driven online courses based on didactic teaching styles can certainly be frustrating for online learners. Learner interaction, collaboration, and good communication are all important motivators for learners to gain optimal learning experience.

Moore, M.G. (1989). Three types of interaction. **American Journal of Distance Education, 3(2)**, pp.1-6

Solution to Exercise (p. 3)

No. Only assessing the quantity of messages posted online can lead to poor quality of online discussions.

Solution to Exercise (p. 3)

Yes. Instructors who participate in online discussions can promote students' deeper involvement by answering questions, providing confirmation, critiques, encouragement, or additional resources.