

assignments are due? How do I provide new information to my students? How do I give feedback so students know how they are progressing in the course?

☞ Teaching an online course can be time-consuming. There is no way around it. More instructor time goes into teaching an online course than typically goes into teaching a face-to-face course – especially the first time the course is designed and delivered. The silver lining is it gets easier (and generally less time-consuming) as an instructor teaches online more. Additionally, most instructors feel their face-to-face courses improve because of the amount of time and thought they have put into developing and teaching their online courses. This time and thought often helps educators rethink how they deliver their face-to-face courses.

☞ Various support levels are necessary for a successful online course. (e.g., technical, student and instructional design). Instructors are content and teaching experts. They should not be forced into the roles of having to provide technical and/or student support. Without this type of support, instructors cannot focus on what they do best – teach.



Gary Kidney, Director of Academic Computing and the Instructional Technology Center at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, has made several presentations on the topic of transitioning from real to virtual classroom. His best tips:

☞ Provide lesson overview pages to organize things. Give students the events of instruction in a numbered list so they always know what to do next and where they stand toward completing each lesson.

☞ Tell students what to do with every link you provide. Many Web courses (and Web pages, for that matter) are just lists of links. For every link in your course, explain what outcomes you expect from students in visiting the link.

☞ Provide examples of previous students' work. No matter how well you think you have described an assignment, there will be hundreds of questions in each student's mind. Showing what a successful assignment looks like answers many questions before they arrive in your inbox as e-mails.

☞ Use graphics and other media, as well as words, to teach. Text-heavy pages are a burden to read and decrease motivation, whereas pages with valuable graphics and multimedia tend to feel more inviting to the learner (some studies show as much as a 68 per cent gain in retention).

☞ Encourage discussion among students. Provide chat rooms and bulletin boards, and pithy and controversial aspects of the topic at hand, and your students will turn learning into a conversation you can moderate and guide, with or without grading.

☞ Set communication expectations. Tell students up front when you are online and when you read your e-mail, and stick to that schedule. Then, they will know what to expect and be pleasantly surprised when you give them more. Otherwise, they will expect you to be online 24-7!

☞ Require the development of artifacts. At the end of your course, students should have produced

something of value demonstrating the skills and knowledge you taught. Research papers, article reviews, tests and quizzes don't count. Marketing plans, a net-worth statement, drawings of costumes for a play, a grant proposal, a research plan or a digital story, do.

☞ Use media to involve students. Got an amusing anecdote that makes an instructional point? Tell it to a video camera and stream the media into your course. Do a dramatic reading, play-act a scenario for later discussion or show some of your research in progress. Many schools have media centres to help you produce these things. They add so much of your personality, which is often missed in online learning, back into the course.

☞ Remember to provide practice before evaluations. The "teach and test" or, in the world of the Web, "read and quiz" method doesn't make for much depth of learning. You'll often have to get creative on how to provide practice in Web-based instruction. Sometimes, consulting with an Instructional Designer, if your school makes one available, really helps.

☞ Provide plenty of feedback. Novice online instructors often find themselves inundated with e-mails. Students asking questions, getting clarifications, etc., should be handled by designing robust online support materials (like FAQ pages). I try to make every e-mail I send be one of feedback on student work. Never send out mass "change item number seven," or "remember x is due next Tuesday," or "What I really want you to do is..." e-mails to the whole class. Every e-mail you send should help students improve or reward improvements they have made.