



Arts and Science Online
CONTINUING AND DISTANCE STUDIES

Resource Guide to Online Instruction

CONTINUING AND DISTANCE STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE
www.queensu.ca/artsci_online

Revised July 2017

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Introduction

In Arts and Science, the online program offered through CDS upholds the level of educational quality associated with Queen's University by using best practices in online learning to guide the development and teaching of online courses, by working collaboratively with academic departments to plan course and program offerings and to identify the best qualified faculty member to develop and teach courses, and by maintaining the academic standards of the Faculty.

The purpose of this document is to provide new online instructors with instructional supports and strategies that will maximize their ability to facilitate learning in an online environment.

“One of the most important ingredients for successful online learning is the creation of social learning online through interaction between the student and instructor among students. In addition, a key role for instructors is to be facilitation, monitor and support online communication.”

(Folinsbee, 2008)

Online vs On-Campus Learning

Online Learning

Advantages of Online Learning

- Flexibility to have online discussions at any point of time.
- Additional interaction among students and instructors.
- Student is responsible for his/her learning.
- Students work online classes into their own timeframe.
- Students can study at their own pace, increasing the course load as necessary.
- Students can revisit course material as required.
- Can lead to a more diverse student body.

Disadvantages of Online Learning

- Without a clear structure, students could go 'off track' with course activities and deadlines.
- Potential isolation from the instructor and/or classmates.
- Learners with low motivation (or poor study habits) could fall behind.
- Technical issues could create frustration when accessing course materials.
- Reliant on accessibility to technical resources.
- Could appear to be difficult to manage online resources for those who are beginning computer skills
- Won't have the 'experience' of utilising traditional on-campus facilities (such as gyms, residence halls, libraries etc).
- Perception of the difficulty in fostering peer collaboration & facilitating student learning.

On-Campus Learning

Advantages of On-Campus Learning

- Face-to-face instruction.
- Students can ask questions immediately.
- Face-to-face interaction with classmates.
- Easier to network with fellow students / Instructors.
- Physical access to on campus-facilities (gyms, residence halls, libraries etc).

Disadvantages of On-Campus Learning

- Students have to go to the 'on-campus' location (which may conflict with personal circumstances, work, seasonal weather etc).
- No flexibility as to when classes can be taken.
- Learning is dependent on the speed of the Instructor, rather than at own pace.

as adapted from Sadara, E. (2014), Gaya, J (2013) and Bass, S. (nd)

Best Practice in Teaching Online

Chickering and Gamson (1987) identify seven principles necessary for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (see table) that guide our practice in teaching and learning online.

Principle		Rationale	How
1	Maximize Learner-Instructor Contact	Learners need to feel supported and Instructors aware of learners' concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be present • facilitate communication • manage conflict
2	Support peer-to-peer contact, teaching and learning	Learners need to feel connected to each other and this helps build a strong community of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empower learners • set up a social forum • provide clear guidelines
3	Emphasize active learning and applied practice	Learners see the instructor as an active participant and are more likely to model this behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inspire and support learners • encourage connections • motivate learners
4	Provide prompt feedback	Affirm learners' achievements and knowledge to promote greater online confidence and participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond to general questions promptly • keep learners on track • provide timely feedback
5	Allocate realistic amounts of time for effective learnings	Learners and teachers learn to use their time well and setting this precedence establishes the basis for high performance for everyone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define time and expectations upfront • establish a basis for performance • outline time management for learning content
6	Good practice communicates high expectations	Instructors set high expectations for not only themselves but also for their students by expecting them to perform well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set high expectations • expect that students will perform well • make extra efforts
7	Emphasize respect for diverse learning styles	Each learner brings different talents and ways of learning to us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide opportunities for students to display talents • create a variety of ways for students to learn

While all seven principles for good practice outlined by Chickering and Gamson (1987) guide our practices, three factors play a critical role in effective course pedagogy in the online learning environment: **active learning techniques**, **cooperative learning among students**, and **student and faculty interaction** (Bangert, 2008). Engaging students in active learning increases their knowledge of content and promotes critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Anderson et al., 2005; Williams & Lahman, 2011), while instilling a sense of belonging to the learning community, increasing communication with the instructor, and enhancing student persistence in online courses (Hart, 2012).

Active Learning

Increased student engagement and improved student learning is achieved by focusing on active and collaborative learning, and minimizing or eliminating the passive transmission of information. Additionally, active learning increases student's knowledge of content and promotes critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Anderson et al. 2005; Williams & Lahman, 2011). Further, students actively engaged with the content promotes participation in a meaningful way and fosters development of new knowledge (Partlow & Gibbs, 2003).

Examples of active online learning strategies may include: case studies, simulations, role play, Socratic questioning, debates, problem-based learning, guided questions, graphic organizers, group projects and virtual labs.

Interaction

Frequent and ongoing interaction is a significant component to a successful online course. Social interaction and the development of an online community reduces feelings of isolation, eases stress and increases confidence (Haythornthwaite, C., Kazmer, M., Robins, J., Shoemaker, S., 2000). Additionally ongoing interaction promotes motivation and learner satisfaction (Harris and Martin, 2012; Sargeant et al., 2006). Part of the course design is establishing ways for peer interaction and instructor-to-student interaction to develop an online community is essential and should be woven throughout the course.

Interaction with Instructor

The effectiveness and quality of instructor contributes more towards student satisfaction than technology. A key component of a quality instructor is his or her interaction with students. Listed below are a few ways to increase interaction with students.

Instructors or TAs can:

- Encourage students to stay motivated and engaged, post weekly updates
- Comment on student progress
- Highlight connections between course topics and current real life examples

- Provide online instructional support that addresses students' difficulties based on quiz scores, questions on discussion board, etc.
- Host online office hours
- Offer a synchronous exam preparation session, which will be recorded and posted

TAs provide the front-line contact with students by checking forums regularly to respond to course-related questions, providing timely and supportive feedback on assignments, outlining current accomplishments and identifying ways to improve.

Interaction among Students

When students collaborate with one another they are more likely to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, develop higher levels of interest and have a more positive online experience.

A few ideas to consider:

- Create small groups at the beginning of the course and perform activities in the same groups throughout the course such as case studies, presentations, etc.
- Have students participate in weekly discussion forums.
- Have students engage in peer feedback for various assignments papers.
- Encourage students to respond to questions posted by peers about content or activities.
- Include synchronous small group activities to promote real-life application of knowledge

Facilitating Discussion Forums

The information provided below is from Rick Nigol's Facilitator's Guide (2011).

A facilitator models good online behaviour in everything she/he does. A good facilitator:

- Establishes a safe, open, non-threatening, comfortable, respectful, constructive, and inclusive environment that encourages open participation;
- Helps the group define norms and codes of conduct and models these;
- Allows for a range of member roles within the group;
- Helps groups build trust among members;
- Injects humour into the proceedings when and where needed.

Task Master

Sometimes the facilitator needs to play the role of task master, helping ensure that the group does not veer too far off track and stays focused on its stated goals. This also involves reminding the group of important deadlines and helping them ensure that all their important tasks are completed in a timely matter in order to maintain the pace of the course or program.

Catalyst and Prober

A very important role for a facilitator is to spur their learners on to think more deeply about the topics, issues, challenges, etc. they are examining. A good facilitator is always asking the provocative questions that encourage critical or creative thinking among learners. Socratic questioning gets learners to go beyond the obvious and to think more deeply and to critically re-examine their own thinking from time to time.

Synthesizer

A good facilitator can help a group find consensus on key issues. She/he is able to weave together areas of agreement among the group and find the common ground. This often involves summarizing or encapsulating discussions and stating these back to the group so that members can focus more upon what unites than what divides them.

Facilitators also make linkages between various topics and themes and provide the relevant segues to the next topic or task at hand for the group.

Cheerleader

Often times the facilitator needs to ensure that the energy and enthusiasm of the group is maintained. This is especially the case of longer duration courses / programs. Groups will need to be working closely and intensely together for a long time and can experience natural ups and downs during the course of a program.

It is important that the facilitator celebrate group victories, accomplishments and key milestones. Simple words of encouragement and support and validation go a long way during the course of an extended program. Group members are sometimes too close to the process and sometimes do not recognize the progress and accomplishments they have made along the way. It is up to the facilitator to ensure that these accomplishments be acknowledged and celebrated.

Referee

There are times that the facilitator needs to help mediate and resolve disputes within a group. Of course, groups should be empowered to do this themselves via the adoption of an agreed-upon group contract around their vision, goals, procedures, and community norms, rules, and netiquette, etc. However, there may be times that a facilitator needs to intervene to ensure that disputes do not fester and undermine the ability of the group to function properly. Often times, this may involve talking to some group members offline to either get to the bottom of things or to address particularly negative online behaviours directly one-on-one.

Facilitation Tips

- Avoid “over-facilitating” – a facilitator who is too quick to jump in to each and every discussion is in danger of possibly stifling debate and interaction among group members (remember the importance of peer-to-peer learning);
- Draw out the quiet or non-participating members – perhaps check in on them privately (offline) to see why they are not participating;
- Get the noisier chatterers to focus on key issues;
- Be the change you want to see – model respectful online behaviour (nastiness is contagious, but so is civility);
- Take things “offline” if some disputes do become nasty...it is often difficult to solve such disputes online.
- Be very careful in the use of humour, irony or satire – these often do not come across as intended in online environments;
- Listen, listen, listen (and then listen again).

Providing Feedback

Advice, evaluation, grades—none of these provide the descriptive information that students need to reach their goals. What is true feedback—and how can it improve learning?

Wiggins (2012)

Feedback to students is an area that our students often identify of high importance to them. In your course, students will be offered several opportunities for both formative feedback and summative feedback. In other words, feedback is **information about how we're doing in our efforts to reach a goal**. In order for a student to know how they are doing, they need to know what it is that they are trying to achieve.

Feedback is a tool that:

- develops cognitive understanding, motivation and engagement, and interpersonal connections.
- helps students learn course material but also helps keep them motivated, engaged in what can feel like an isolated environment, and connected to the course.
- fosters interpersonal connections between instructors and students.
- has a direct implication on whether students have meaningful interactions with course materials and overall positive course experiences.

Mandernach J. & Garrett, J. (2014)

On a practical level, examples of what feedback can 'look' like is as follows:

Timely:	Provide feedback on assignments within 7 days Respond to forums & emails within 24 hours
Meaningful:	Target individual needs Specifically link to assessment criteria
In-time:	Give time for the student to improve before the next assignment
Constructive:	Highlight strengths and weaknesses

Feedback is NOT advice, praise, or a performance evaluation. When giving feedback, consider... 'given the feedback, does the learner have some ideas about how to improve'?

The following table illustrates seven (7) key areas that should be considered when providing feedback:

Feedback should be:	Which means:
Goal-referenced	Remind the student about the initial goal ('the goal of this assessment was...') and then give goal-related information about his or her actions (when re-reading your assignment, this could be achieved by considering...doing...evaluating...')
Tangible and Transparent	Feedback must be clear and understood by the student. Avoid jargon and remember your goal is that the student will understand what they can learn from the feedback. Consider responding like a 'reader' and not just a 'grader'.
Actionable	Let the student know what they have to do, what they could consider reviewing, what areas of research they should look at next time etc. Students need to understand how they could do a better job the next time.
User-friendly (specific and personalized)	Consider the person that you are giving the feedback to and target the feedback to them. Consider just providing feedback in one or two areas where they could make improvements (giving too much feedback can be overwhelming and not user-friendly).
Timely	The sooner that students receive feedback, the better. Students need to know what they can do to improve prior to the next assignment, test, discussion etc. Giving feedback too late can take away from the relevance of it (and restrict their ability to improve).
Ongoing	Ongoing feedback provides the student with the opportunity to adapt their skills, style etc and then implement the advice in a practical manner.
Consistent	Students can only adjust their performance if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate and trustworthy. As a part of the teaching team, it is your responsibility to agree the standards of what high quality work 'looks' like, how you will give feedback and what that feedback 'looks' like.

As adapted from Wiggins G (2012)

Roles and Responsibilities

In the online environment, it is important that the existing design and framework of the course is maintained in order to preserve the integrity of the course. The role of the instructor is to facilitate student learning within this framework. In the absence of the face-to-face environment and the feedback loop that occurs naturally within that environment, online communication and learner support are key. Communication takes place through feedback on assignments, facilitated online discussions, regular progress reports and real-time chats. A significant investment of time from both students and instructor is required to sustain a vibrant and effective online learning community.

Before the Course Starts

- Adopt course textbooks through the Campus Bookstore and order desk copies.
- Contact the Library to set up the e-reserve (if applicable).
- Check the Start Here and Timeline in the course onQ site for inaccuracies/needed changes.
- Check Assignments and Discussion Forum instructions for inaccuracies/needed changes.
- Check dates in the course and ensure they are correct.
- Inform your Learning Management System Specialist (LMS) or ID of any changes you make on onQ so that s/he can ensure that important information is updated everywhere, including the Arts & Science Online website.
- Work with your LMS Specialist to ensure that any outstanding issues are resolved before the course begins.
- Decide how the marking will be divided for the course, keeping in mind the numbers of students on your own contract and each TA's contract. Inform TAs how marking will be divided and which Grader is responsible for which assignments/students.
- Create an audio or video welcome message (See appendix for details)

During the first week

- Post an introduction and welcome message to course announcements that includes something about yourself. You may want to remind them of the requirements for week 1.
- Make sure all of your students have logged into onQ by the end of the first week. If not, send them an email and invite them to the course.
- Monitor the course questions forum and your email, respond within 24 hours.

While the Course is Running

- Read student emails and the forums frequently, responding to students as appropriate. This is extremely important in an online course, since students usually do not have the option of finding their instructor in person for urgent matters. Respond within 24 hours.
- If applicable, attend and host any synchronous sessions that have been set up, unless a TA is hosting the sessions.
- Grade assignments and provide feedback to students in a timely manner. Turnaround time should be within a week.
- Connect with students who have not logged in within a 5-7 days.
- Use the Course Announcements to make any important announcements.

At the End of the Course

- Assign any remaining grades in onQ.
- Final grades are due in PeopleSoft by the following deadlines (PeopleSoft Grade Entry):
 - Courses with a final scheduled exam: 10 days after the course exam date
 - Courses with no final scheduled exam: 10 days after the end of term
- If an exam has not been returned from an off-campus exam centre by the grade deadline, enter GD (Grade Deferred) for these students and follow up with a Change of Grade form once the exam has been marked.

*Please note that if you would like to explore functions such as the discussion forum or gradebook in onQ, CDS can provide documentation on request.

Administrative Information

- Any inquiries from students that you are unable to answer can be forwarded to cds@queensu.ca
- If you are waiving the prerequisite(s) for a student to enrol in your course, please forward the email to cds@queensu.ca and we will create a permission number and follow up with the student

Student Accommodations

- If a student sends their accommodations letter from Disability Services, please forward the letter to cds@queensu.ca. We will ensure that the accommodations are met in online quizzes and midterms as well as online and face-to-face final exams. Extensions for assignments are at your discretion.
- If CDS receives an accommodations letter directly from a student, we will set up the appropriate accommodations in the course and follow up with you.

Technical Support

- During working hours (Monday-Friday from 9-4) students can contact the CDS office if they are experiencing technical difficulty in the course onQ site. We recommend that quiz and assignment deadlines fall during these working hours.
- The main CDS email (cds@queensu.ca) is monitored on weekends to provide technical support as needed.
- If your course uses Adobe Connect, we will provide technical support during mandatory sessions. If you or your TAs would like training in using Adobe Connect, please contact Candace Parsons (candace.parsons@queensu.ca).

onQ Forums

- During the term, we will post reminders to students about upcoming sessional dates (i.e. last day add/drop, examination-related information, etc.).
- The Course Questions forum is monitored on a regular basis by the CDS team. We will follow up with you regarding any outstanding issues. We will respond to administrative-related questions in the forums as needed.

Examinations

- If your course has a final proctored exam, a print copy of your exam is due to the Exams Office 4 weeks prior to the start of the examination period. Information will be emailed to you ahead of this deadline. Students writing with an **online proctor** will complete their exam in onQ, therefore we also require an electronic copy of the exam by this date (with an answer key if applicable) which can be emailed to Monica Desjardins (desjardm@queensu.ca).

- Students writing **off-campus** will write their proctored exam on the date scheduled by the University although the start time may vary slightly. Many of the p.m. exams start at 1:00 p.m. or 1:30 p.m. depending on the Exam Centre. An e-mail is sent to these students approximately 2 weeks prior to the exam period with the exam location details and confirming the date and start time. If a student has provided CDS with a letter from Accessibility Services, the accommodations are included in the e-mail. If you receive questions from students about their exam, feel free to forward the e-mail to CDS (cds@queensu.ca) and we will copy you on the response.
- Students who contact us to request a deferred exam, are referred to the instructor. The decision to defer an exam is at the discretion of the instructor based on the extenuating circumstances and appropriate documentation. If the student is an on-campus student, arrangements to write the deferred exam are between the student and the instructor. If the student is off-campus, CDS will work with the instructor and student to find the best date/time for the student to write the deferred exam. Students can only write an exam early with approval from the Associate Dean (Studies) and support from the instructor. Approval is only granted in very exceptional circumstances.
- Exams written on-campus can be picked up by the instructors at the Exams Office. We will e-mail you when your off-campus exams start arriving in our office and these exams can be picked up in Dunning Hall, Main Floor, Room 134.

CDS Contact Information

Contact	Roles
Assistant Dean Teaching and Learning Bev King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall responsibility for CDS
Manager, Course Development and Operations Monica Desjardins desjardm@queensu.ca ext. 74539	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course revision and instructor support during the term Course syllabi Off-campus exams/proctors Administrative questions Importation of content into Moodle prior to the course opening
Learning Management System Specialist Erik Bigras, eb105@queensu.ca Marisa Lavoratore, m.lavoratore@queensu.ca Karishma Vaz, kv27@queensu.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quizzes, assignments, videos, etc. Provide assistance with technical and Moodle issues throughout the course Help to provide ideas on structure of the course in Moodle in partnership with the ID
Examination/Quality Assurance Specialist Su Earle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off-campus exams/proctors
Manager, Instructional Design and Learning Technology John Saville, savillej@queensu.ca ext. 75072	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online course design Instructor and TA liaison Prepares contracts for TAs and instructors
Instructional Design Multimedia Support Analyst Julian Enright julian.enright@queensu.ca ext. 74704 Candace Parsons candace.parsons@queensu.ca ext 77190	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of multimedia content (e.g. video editing, activity creation, interactive material) Streaming video management (e.g. you give me the video and I upload it for you) Adobe Connect training/troubleshooting AODA compliance (e.g. video captioning, transcripts, etc) No actual work within Moodle
Academic Advisor David Youssef youssefd@queensu.ca ext. 77770	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic advising
Instructional Designer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keren Akiva Wanda Beyer Christina Dinsmore Debbie Jennings Rick Nigol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts as a project manager Provides the course developer with expertise in online course design and best practices Helps to align learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments Coordinates with other CDS staff

Appendix A

Structure of Welcome Message

- Introduce yourself
- Personal Connection or enthusiasm about teaching this course
- Overview of course/pacing
- Highlight various course components
- Remind them to read course syllabus and timeline for due dates
- Contact information
- How to get started/first activity

Below is a link to an exemplary instructor welcome message

https://vimeo.com/95767694?utm_campaign=October%2014%20Tech%20Tips&utm_content=Exemplary%20Welcome%20Online%20Course%20Video&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter

Appendix B

Sample Letters to Students

A. Introductory Forum Post

Dear Students,

Welcome to Course 101. I am delighted to have you in my online course.

My name is Elizabeth and I will be your online instructor. I have been teaching this course for X years and looking forward to teaching it every term. I completed my degree at x in x and my current research focuses on students with exceptionalities and their psychological need to belong in inclusive classrooms. My years as a special education teacher have given me the opportunity to work in a variety of settings with diverse learners. The most significant undertaking of my teaching career was co-teaching with a regular education teacher in an inclusive classroom.

I am looking forward to learning more about you as I read your introductions. Please take time to read your classmates' introductions and feel free to ask questions about one another. If you have any course questions or concerns, please feel free to post them on the discussion forum titled, *Course Questions*. If your question is more personal in nature, please feel free to send me an email. I will respond within 24 hours. I would like you to feel supported throughout the course.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth

B. Letter to Disengaged Students

Dear <insert student's name>,

I am checking in to ensure that you are doing okay. I noticed that you have not been active in the course within the past week. If there is anything I can do to support you, please let me know.

Kind regards,

<insert your name>

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