

Teaching Practices

You enjoy the interaction in a regular classroom and are now wondering – How is teaching online different? You have a notion that things will be different, but are not sure how to take your course that you have developed and actually begin to teach online using it. We will work on that in this section.

We also differentiate between practices associated with “teaching” and practices associated with “managing” your online class. We will focus on teaching in this section, and focus on classroom management in [Managing Your Online Class](#)

Some key questions in this section:

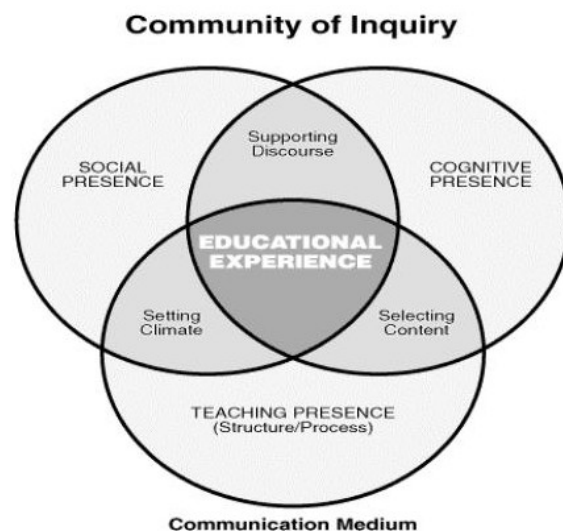
- What does the research suggest about how practices should change when teaching online?
- Why is your presence an important component of an online learning community?
- Do the time-tested Seven Principles of Good Practice change when teaching online?

Social Presence / Cognitive Presence / Teaching Presence

Several studies have reinforced the importance of the faculty member’s social presence in an online learning environment (Tu, 2000; Richardson and Swan, 2003; Rovai and Barnum, 2003; Palloff and Pratt, 2007). Whereas face-to-face communication has the most social presence and text on a page has the least, online courses fall in between. It takes conscious thought and action for students to see the faculty (and each other) as “real” people in their online class. Palloff and Pratt note:

There is one important element, however, that sets online distance learning apart from the traditional classroom setting: Key to the learning processes are the interactions among students themselves, the interactions between faculty and students, and the collaboration in learning that results from these interactions (p. 4).

Student-faculty contact does not just occur but instead is the result of active participation and interaction by you with your online students. Mupinga, Nora and Yaw (2006) noted that frequent communication with the instructor puts the online students at ease to know they are not missing anything or that they are not alone in cyberspace. Interaction with online instructors has been correlated with increased learning. Students with the highest levels of interaction with the instructor also had the highest levels of learning, according to



{Image courtesy of [Garrison, Anderson and Archer](#)}

Frederickson et al. (2000). Several researchers have noted that teaching presence is a significant determinate of student satisfaction, perceived learning, and sense of community (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Arbaugh, 2008; Shea et al. 2004, 2005).

Your perceived presence in your online classes is therefore critical.

Many tend to think that online classes are cold, but researchers have found that online communication can be just as personal, if not more, than non-computer mediated communication. The literature on social presence suggests that you and your students can create and maintain a sense of social presence through the following strategies:

- Expression of emotions
- Self-disclosure
- Continuing a thread
- Quoting from other messages
- Referring explicitly to other messages
- Asking questions
- Complimenting, expressing appreciation
- Expressing agreement
- Vocatives (i.e., referring to participants by name)
- Addresses or refers to the group using inclusive pronouns
- Phatics / Salutations (i.e., communication that is purely social)

(Rourke et al., 2001)

For additional reading on social presence, check out:

- [Assessing Teaching Presence in a Computer Conferencing Context](#)
Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001), JALN Volume 5, Issue 2 - September 2001
- [Teaching Presence Online Facilitates Meaningful Learning](#)
Lowenthal and Parscal, Regis University The Learning Curve, Spring 2008,
This article provides some useful strategies for creating teaching and social presence in an online class.
- [Online Teaching Presence and Community of Inquiry](#)
Two recent presentations providing an overview of these concepts

Preparing Students for Online Learning

You are prepared to teach online. Are your students prepared to learn online?

In [Getting Started: Student Readiness to Learn](#), we discussed skills and attributes of successful online students. Taking it one step further, there are specific practices that you can do to prepare your students for online learning.

You should recognize that student problems online quickly become your problems as well, so it helps to be proactive. Student problems generally fall into three categories:

- **Technical Problems**

Students arrive at your online class with a broad range of technical skills. It helps first to be upfront in your expectations and clear in your directions. Our Blackboard learning management system has a TAB called Downloads and Help, with FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) and links to the HelpDesk. Do not be afraid to act as a referral service and send your students to the HelpDesk!

- **Learning Style Problems**

Some students expect the teacher-directed lecture and test process they experienced in K-12, and find the self-directed nature of online learning difficult. Providing clear instructions and then following up when those instructions are not followed can help in the long run.

- **Communication Problems**

Unless you use a form of web conferencing, most online communications lack the visual feedback mechanisms we use in class. There are time delays inherent in online communication. Providing specific expectations - “I will respond to email in 24 hours and return graded assignments in one week” – and of course, following your own guidelines, will mitigate communication issues. Your presence again makes a huge difference. If you positively stroke those communicating in discussion boards and privately email those who are not participating, it will send the signal that you care...and your students will rise to your expectations.

Some of your students will be experienced online learners, while others are new to online learning. A good suggestion is to provide an orientation to your class in the “Syllabus” section of your online class. Ko and Rossen (2007) suggest your orientation include:

- Overview of course schedule
- Expectations on time commitments, assignment due dates, and interaction with other students
- Expectations on communications to and from you as the faculty
- A tutorial on how you will use Blackboard
- Expectations regarding computer, other hardware (such as a headset), and software; as well as expectations on student minimum technical skills required.

For instance, your students should already know these basic technical skills:

1. Use browser (Firefox or Internet Explorer)
 2. Use a search engine (Google, Yahoo, etc.)
 3. Send and receive email (including attaching files)
 4. Save files to a hard drive or flash drive
 5. Find files on a hard drive or flash drive (navigate folders)
 6. Use word processing software that can save files in the MS Word format.
 7. Update computer with anti-virus software
- An initial assignment that tests their technical skills

Remember that an orientation does not have to be text-based. Effective orientations can be built using [LessonBuilder](#) or screencasts using products like [Camtasia](#) or [Jing](#).

You might expect that there would be some technical issues, given the online environment, but do not overlook the typical behavioral or motivational problems that you might have experienced in your face-to-face classes. Some students will drop online classes earlier in the semester than you are used to, as they quickly

decide if online is a good fit for them. Others will try but fall behind and be frustrated. Your design and your practice can help alleviate these motivational issues:

- Provide opportunities for student collaboration and facilitate their collaborative learning processes.
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate in real-time through online collaboration tools such as Wimba Classroom.
- Choose the right tone of conversation in online communication to make students feel comfortable with the learning environment, to establish trust in communication, and to reduce feelings of isolation and enhance a sense of community
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement
- Provide a weekly “wrap up” before the next lesson begins
- Take an active role in helping your students think and learn actively through careful task structuring, questioning, and scaffolding.
- In online discussions, consider:
 - Designing thought-provoking questions to elicit student discussions on the topics of your focus
 - Providing a weekly summary of discussion topics to demonstrate your participation
 - Redirecting off-topic discussion through gentle reminders or a recast of the question
 - Assessing messages by both quantity and quality
 - In addition, consider providing a social space where students can bond and feel open to discussing topics outside the course bounds. It is also good practice to provide a faculty "office" in the discussion forums.

Building Community

While faculty members traditionally work to create a learning community in face-to-face classes, a common mistake in translating educational work online is to see the process as individualistic. Earlier in this decade, nearly 80 percent of elearning was designed for solo work, which in effect made it little different from correspondence courses (Galvin, 2001). Research has shown that learning:

“...is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding” (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p. 1).

We tend to agree with Palloff and Pratt (2007), who suggest that community is the central feature of online courses. They noted that the interaction and presence of the people in a community, coupled with processes that are reflective, constructivist, and social, and guided by articulated purpose, leads to the types of outcomes one desires in education – co-created knowledge, increased self-direction and transformed self-learning.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) go on to suggest that community is developed online by:

- Active interaction involving both course content and personal communication
- Collaborative learning evidenced by comments directed primarily student to student rather than student to faculty

- Socially constructed meaning evidenced by questioning, reflection and agreement
- Sharing of resources among students
- Expressions of support and encouragement exchanged between students as well as from faculty, including willingness to critically evaluate the work of others

For community to develop, your students need to sense the presence of you and each other in order to begin to build trust. Palloff and Pratt suggest that the keys to creating a successful learning community revolve around “honesty, responsiveness, relevance, respect, openness, and empowerment” (p. 22).

Building this community starts in the first week of an online course. We have used online ice breakers during the first week to humanize the individuals in the community, illustrating both the similarities of the members and their individual uniquenesses. E-Tivities by Gilly Salmon (2001) has a variety of activities that can be used online to build community. Additional suggestions from practitioners are exchanged in a social networking site run by and for faculty – [College 2.0](#).

[Book Review of Building Online Learning Communities, Palloff and Pratt \(2007\)](#)

7 Principles of Good Practice in Online Teaching

Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson published their Seven Principles in 1987, synthesizing fifty years of research to develop [seven principles](#) that they viewed as core to effective teaching:

1. Good Practice Encourages Student-Faculty Contact
2. Good Practice Encourages Cooperation among Students
3. Good Practice Encourages Active Learning
4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback
5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task
6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations
7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

You will undoubtedly recognize these as core to your own face-to-face teaching. As you beginning to explore online delivery of your courses, a natural question is how do you translate what you currently are doing as you transition your course online?

In reviewing the literature, many suggest that the while the content and the learning outcomes are the same, the manner in which that content is delivered and the interactions with students are quite different. Ko and Rosen (2008) suggest that developing an online course starts at the same place where you develop a face-to-face course. You set the goals for the course, describes the specific learning objectives, defines the tasks necessary to meet those objectives, and then creates applicable assignments around these tasks. The fundamentals are the same, the technique is very different. So in many ways, the design of an online course mirrors the design of a face-to-face course. Both have clear learning objectives. Assessment of learning is critical in both. Yet the fundamental practices for delivering the instruction and facilitating learner interaction are quite different.

What is different in our view flows from our observation that the web has become social. Online courses require your social presence in order for the course to be effective. Several studies have reinforced the importance of the faculty member's social presence in an online learning environment (Tu, 2000; Richardson and Swan, 2003; Rovai and Barnum, 2003; Palloff and Pratt, 2007). Social presence supports the notion that students see you (and each other) as "real" people in their online class.

This social presence of students leads to our second difference. Students need to form a learning community in order for the course to be effective. While you have traditionally worked to create a learning community in your face-to-face classes, a common mistake in translating educational work online is to see the process as individualistic. Earlier in this decade, nearly 80 percent of elearning was designed for solo work, which in effect made it little different from correspondence courses (Galvin, 2001). Research has shown that learning:

"is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding" (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p. 1).

Finally, active engaged learning activities are required for the course to be effective. This is where the Seven Principles come in.

Good teaching online is no different than good teaching face-to-face, in that effective teaching incorporates each of these practices. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) expanded on these principles to illustrate that technology can be a lever to implementing these principles. The [Task Force on Quality in Distance Education](#) for the University System of Ohio has also adopted these seven principles as foundational to e-learning (Ohio Learning Network, 2003).

Therefore, to explore how you could translate your face-to-face experience to online teaching, it is helpful to see how other have translated these principles in an online environment (TLT Group, 2004; Graham et al, 2001). In the web pages that follow, we outline a series of vignettes, supporting material and links to online tools meant to articulate how the seven principles can be applied as a means of supporting the transition to online teaching and learning.