

# Teaching Messages Collection 2020-2021

38 Teaching Messages from 30 Institutions

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## Preparing for a Strange Semester

We've been through a roller-coaster in the past few months. "The number of COVID-19 cases is climbing!" "We've flattened the curve!" "We will have all classes fully in person in the fall." "The semester will end before Thanksgiving." "Restaurants and hair salons will reopen next week." "All classes will be fully remote." "The U.S. reported a record number of new cases for the fifth time in seven days." "Only freshmen and seniors will be allowed on campus." "Masks are optional." "International students must take at least one on-campus course." "Masks are required." "Students will be welcomed back to campus and will live in dorms, but will attend all classes remotely, from their dorm rooms."

The only thing we know with any certainty is that the situation changes daily, and will continue to do so for some time. So ask yourself: What are the most important things students need to take away from your class? How can you connect that material to your students' lives, to what they are experiencing now? How can you make it evident to your students that you are concerned for their well-being as much as for their learning?

1. **Communicate.** Connect with your students through text message or email announcement. Let them know you are available to respond to questions. Manage their expectations regarding your response time. "I will respond to your email within 24 hours ..."
2. **Care.** Acknowledge that these times are challenging. Ask students how they will manage their time. Remind them that tutoring and academic advising is available through the Advising and Enrichment Center, as is emotional support through Counseling and Wellness.
3. **Review your expectations.** What do you think you can realistically accomplish during this time period? Do you think you can maintain your original syllabus and schedule? Do you hope students will keep up with the reading with some assignments to add structure and accountability? Do you just want to keep them engaged with the course content somehow? Review your dates and deadlines: do any of them need to change?
4. **Be transparent.** Tell students what you know and what you don't know. "We will not have the class we anticipated, but I am still going to do my best to provide you with a high-quality learning experience. Here's how ..."
5. **Be flexible.** Keep in mind the impact this situation may have on students' ability to meet those expectations, including illness, lacking power or internet connections, or needing to care for family members. Be ready to handle requests for extensions or accommodations equitably.

The teaching you do during this time can make a tremendous impact on your students, especially if you also model compassion, resilience, and grit.

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## Taking Care of YOU While Teaching from Home

It's becoming increasingly clear that the 2020-2021 academic year is going to look dramatically different for most of us in higher education, [here's one \(of many\) op-eds](#) about what the future of higher education may look like. Many universities will offer more courses (if not the majority of them) in an online format, which means more of us may continue to teach from home. This teaching tip offers some strategies for how you can take care of yourself while adjusting to this new normal.

**Tip 1: Take a break from Zoom (or any other video chat services you're using).** As we shifted quickly into working and teaching from home, Zoom became our lifeline. It provides connection to our students and colleagues in a way that is more personal than an email...but even [the BBC agrees that it's exhausting!](#) Being attentive on a video call takes more energy than an in-person conversation because we have to work harder to process body language and we can't naturally observe non-verbal cues. Plus, we're aware of being watched, which can lead to expending energy being performative.

Remember the meme at the start of our stay-home situation that said "we're about to find out if all those meetings really could have been emails after all"?! But instead, we just shifted from in-person meetings to video meetings. Maybe it's time to *actually find out if emails can replace some meetings!*

Consider video chats only when you can clearly articulate the value in gathering together – do you need folks in one place at the same time to strategize or brainstorm? If it's just an update or passive transmission of information, send an email. Are you concerned that viewpoints will be lost without the interactive discussion that a virtual meeting can create? Perhaps try a collaborative tool (check out this [Microsoft Teams](#) tutorial) to gather those multiple perspectives.

If you can't opt out of video meetings, try this: As the host, normalize turning off the video after welcoming everyone. (If you're not the host, talk with them about this strategy or post in the chat that you're choosing this option, so others can feel more comfortable doing the same). This reduces that performative pressure. Yes, it will be harder to ensure that folks are paying attention but let's be honest, when we held in-person meetings and classes, many participants weren't always paying attention and we didn't force them to make eye contact 100% of the time. Instead, we invited them into the space by calling on them or by asking open ended questions. We can do the same on a video call, without the video.

**Tip 2: Manage screen and sitting fatigue.** It's not just video meetings that are exhausting, it's [staring at a screen way more than we used to](#). Screen fatigue actually has a real name: computer vision syndrome (CVS). If you're experiencing a significant increase in eye strain and headaches, it's likely due to the fact that you're now grading all assignments via your LMS as well as electronically reading textbook chapters, plus all of the emails and document editing that we do via screens. There are strategies to address this - try [eye yoga](#) (no flexibility or downward dog poses required).

It isn't just our eyes that are impacted when we're at a computer all day. We're at greater risk for repetitive motion injuries like carpal tunnel and our posture suffers too. Check out the [Wakeout app](#), which features 30 second "workouts" - there is a great set of activities for hand health. You can also try the free [WorkRave](#) software. WorkRave does a lot of great things – it prompts you for "microbreaks" with a set of hand, eye and shoulder stretches and it can lock down your computer for a few minutes at

an interval of your choosing so you can take a break – try setting it at 90 minute intervals to force yourself to hydrate.

**Tip 3: Practice Mindfulness.** Nothing like a pandemic to ramp up anxiety, amirite? Mindfulness (defined as: a process of purposely bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment) can be developed through the practice of meditation. Cultivating a daily meditation practice can keep anxiety at a low simmer. The free meditation app, [Insight Timer](#), has a set of guided meditations geared specifically towards wellness during the pandemic. Another evidence based strategy is [journaling](#), which helps people identify and process negative emotions, and ultimately alleviate anxiety. Here's a [short video by Tim Ferriss](#), noted entrepreneur and wellness blogger, to show you how to use journaling for focus and anxiety relief.

Finally, this Chronicle of Higher Ed article: "[Productivity and happiness under sustained disaster conditions](#)" provides some useful advice for faculty, including strategies to "protect your mental health and emotional resilience".

Here's hoping that one or more of these tips will help you settle into teaching from home in a way that feels meaningful, valuable and productive. Being able to share these tips, and how you've successfully used them, with students may also help them settling into online learning in the fall and beyond.

Happy teaching (from home)!

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## Small Steps for a Compassionate Semester

As can be said about effective teaching in general, compassion and empathy matter deeply this fall for creating an effective and safe classroom atmosphere. You can take a few small steps to ensure that you and your students experience a compassionate semester:

- Be kind to yourself. Your newly hybrid, online, or physically distanced course is not going to be perfect—and that's OK. This is unfamiliar territory, and you didn't have much time to prepare. Be patient with yourself, focus on what's most important, and be prepared to adjust your plans as you go.
- Remember to build responsive and resilient dimensions into your pedagogy – know your students' struggles if they're willing to share, and craft alternative activities / assessments should any student face difficulties.
- Find your way with your students, together. The new environment may initially feel quite awkward and strange for everyone. Have a good laugh with your students when things happen (for instance, you discover you've accidentally muted them and then can't figure out why they aren't responding to your questions!). Ask them about how the experience is working for them and respond to their concerns. You'll see in just a few sessions how much more comfortable everyone will be navigating this temporary environment.
- Communicate a message of understanding frequently to your students. Be flexible in your expectations, understand with each other as you smooth out the bumps, and commit to learning from each other as you go. You may not be able to accomplish learning in exactly the same ways as before, but you may be surprised at solutions you come up with together.
- Ask for help when you need it. Chances are, others are experiencing the same challenges and weird scenarios – share your struggles and discover new ways to resolve them!

### **Submitted by:**

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## Being Human Online During COVID-19

Even before COVID-19, there has long been an emphasis on “humanizing online learning,” or pushing back on the criticism of online learning as a solitary, disconnected learning environment. The [#HumanizeOL](#) movement emphasizes practices familiar to the [Community of Inquiry framework](#), which consists of social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence in online learning (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). The bottom line is that online environments can be engaging, humanizing places if they are designed intentionally.

In the context of COVID-19, it is important to also remember that we are humans in front of and apart from screens. While much of our work has always been connected to screens, [this pandemic has made almost all of our work facilitated through screens](#), and we should recognize the toll that can take on ourselves and our students. [We lose our sense of time because we have been stripped of our normal routines](#). The new term “Zoombie” refers to how one feels after being in too many Zoom meetings (see [one definition of Zoombie](#), plus [#zoombie](#) in use). These pandemic-related struggles remind us that we have bodies that need to stretch, move, and rest; minds that need to reflect, slow down, prioritize, and orient. Some of this can happen with a screen, but we also need to step away.

In the spirit of attending to human needs, this teaching tip offers questions upon which to reflect.

### Questions to Consider

After a relentless semester of moving to remote teaching, we likely need to attend to our own work and wellness to ensure we’re ready to support students. Some of the Your Work and Wellness questions are informed by [Beating Pandemic Burnout](#), whose author has written *Agile Faculty* and has a contract to write a book on faculty burnout.

### Your Work and Wellness

- ❖ What habits and routines ground you during remote work?
- ❖ Do you move in meaningful, restorative ways through exercise or other active means?
- ❖ What boundaries can you set for work realms and rest? What signs have you set for when new or revised boundaries are needed?
  - When do you think your computer should be turned off for the day? When it's time to stop online "checking" (email, social media, task lists)?
- ❖ When do you feel your best, and how can these points be extended, more frequent, or best used?
- ❖ What you might need to put on hold or let go of in light of how life has changed?
- ❖ What most motivates and energizes you?

### Students and Teaching

- ❖ **Do you encourage student wellness with words and course design?** We can remind students in the syllabus that all of the normal supports and resources usually listed in the syllabus are still available to them (counseling, tutoring), and additionally add what is available specific to current struggles, such as additional financial support.

- ❖ **Can students take some course learning on the go?** Does some of course material involve podcasts or mobile-friendly reading? Can some student activities take place on the go, such as handwritten notes, place-based photos, or their own video or audio?
- ❖ **Do you express empathy in words and course design?** The syllabus is a great place to start (see an [Adjusted Syllabus Statement](#) written soon after the sudden shift to online, which can be further adjusted for current semesters).
- ❖ **How are names used in courses?** We love the sound of our own name, and using student names in class feedback text or videos is a powerful way to pull students in and together. The [Sharing Your Name Pronunciation Teaching Tip](#) provides direction on how the class can better know one another's names. If you use discussion forums, I like having students sign off posts with the name they go by, and when replying to others address them by name.
- ❖ **How do you and your students get to express and share who you are?** When I first started teaching online, I was intrigued by the lives, interests, struggles, and talents of my students. I often found the composition of my online classes more diverse and face-to-face classes, because online students were out in the world, and their learning was informed by experiences. This realization made me want to invite my students to share their stories as often as possible. Students can develop their Moodle profiles, which go with them from class to class, by including text, video, and audio. Since I didn't have much traction with optional social forums in the past, I upgraded it slightly to include weekly prompts and challenges that earned students a little bit of extra credit ([see more in this page on class community](#)).
- ❖ **When and how do you ask students how they are doing, and enable students to do this for one another?** Students can be reminded of how to communicate with one another and can perhaps discuss ways beyond Moodle they'd like to communicate. I have also included "Help Lines" for students within Moodle, which are simple, optional activity tools that invite students to express whether they are stuck or concerned about their ability to complete a course. I have written about this and other ways to ["take the temperature" in a course](#).

#### Additional Insight and Resources

- [Developing Connections in Your Online Classroom](#) (video: 14 minutes)
- [Humanizing Online Teaching](#) (5-page guide, list form)
- [The Human Work of Higher Education](#), from *Hybrid Pedagogy*, originally published in the AAUP's *Academe*

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## Increasing Syllabus Use: It's Not Just for the First Day

As a learning guide and manual for a course, the syllabus communicates requirements, expectations, recommendations, strategies, resources, and more for a successful course outcome. An engaging syllabus tends to be perceived by students as user-friendly and helpful and as a comprehensive learning aid. With an effective syllabus students are motivated to do well in the course and are even incentivized to enroll in subsequent courses with their teacher. Encourage students to refer back to the syllabus often throughout the term, and not just at the beginning of the course.

### First Day Syllabus Activities:

- Syllabus Contract – prepare a document for students to sign
- Syllabus Scavenger Hunt – create a worksheet with clues for F2F or online activity
- Syllabus Online Escape Room – build a series of meaningful syllabus puzzles using LMS adaptive release
- Syllabus Re-Write – make space in the syllabus for students to (re)write specific sections of the syllabus based on their questions, needs, or interests with learning, such as course policies, netiquette, calendar, and/or assessments

### Ongoing Syllabus Activities:

- Discussion Board responses for student FAQs: “It’s in your syllabus.”, “Where can you find this information in the syllabus?”, “What does the syllabus say about \_\_\_?”
- Question Prompts: “How does [concept/topic] connect to SLO \_\_\_?”, “How do you anticipate this assignment will help you to achieve the lesson and course objectives?”, “Which assignments will help you prepare for the [assessment]?”, “What else should be included in the syllabus to help you accomplish \_\_\_?”
- Exit Tickets: “Which learning outcome(s) tie directly to today’s activity?”, “What is due next?”, “How should I prepare for the upcoming [assignment/assessment]?”
- Game-based Strategy on Online Assignments/Assessments: Lock low-stakes assignments/assessments with a passcode that can only be answered by referring to the syllabus. “What is the next assignment that is due in this course?”, “What is the word that is found on page #2, paragraph #3, word #15?”, “What is the word limit for this assignment?”, “How many multiple-choice questions will this quiz have?”
- Course Evaluation – instruct students to have their syllabus handy when completing their course mid-term and end-of-term evaluations

### Last Day Syllabus Activities:

- Syllabus Walkthrough – summarize what was accomplished in the course
- Syllabus Contract Review– revisit the Syllabus Contract and discuss how students abided by the contract; celebrate successes
- Syllabus Reflection Discussion/Activity – have students reflect on their experiences in the course

Resource:

Midland College. (2017, January 18). "It's in your syllabus" [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/M9DLZO1J8aQ>

References:

Grunert, J. (1997). *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Iannarelli, B. A., Bardsley, M. E., & Foote, C. J. (2010). Here's your syllabus, see you next week: A review of the first day practices of outstanding professors. *The Journal of Effective Teaching, 10*(2), 29-41.

Palmer, M. S., Wheeler, L. B., & Aneece, I. (2016). Does the document matter? The evolving role of syllabi in higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 48*(4), 36-46.

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## Some Strategies to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in Online Courses

Diversity and inclusion are vital components of contemporary education. When everyone in a class feels accepted for who they are, they may be more comfortable participating and sharing their views. It can be especially important to promote diversity and inclusion in an online setting, where people may feel distanced from each other. Here are some useful strategies:

### Be Available

Work with students in such a way that if a student has a problem or a concern, feels ostracized or otherized for any reason, or feels triggered by something in your course, they will be comfortable discussing it with you. Even if you don't have a ready answer, acknowledge their humanity by truly listening to what they say. This can go a long way toward embracing diversity and inclusion in this and other courses.

### Foster Community Building

Spend some time in building community. Let students get to know each other and you through bio sketches and pictures. Have yours on the course website when students log in initially. Provide instructions for students to add theirs. The pictures can be of something important to the person, like a pet or favorite location. Encourage students to read each other's bio sketches by assigning a post identifying things they have in common with x number of students.

### Protect Feelings

Some students don't like turning on their cameras for class due to issues of privacy. Encourage everyone to turn on cameras during class by requiring students to create virtual backgrounds of one or more assigned colors. In this way, everyone will have and use a virtual background, so no one will be stigmatized by their surroundings. This also facilitates putting students into groups, because you can visually see who is in the blue group, the yellow group, and so forth. Moving people from one group to another is also easier with the colors as visual cues.

### Thoughtfully (Re-)Consider Content

Our society is dealing with two serious viruses at the moment. One has been a problem for less than a year. One has been a problem for over 400 years. One is COVID-19, and one is racism. Even though you may have used an assignment about mass graves in the past, ask yourself if this semester, you might be able to find another text that achieves the same pedagogical purpose without possibly triggering negative memories. Do the same with assignments using otherizing terminology or scenarios. You may have a stellar module on *Huck Finn* planned, but is this the best choice to use this semester? Challenge yourself to use content that achieves your pedagogical purposes and affirms each student's identity and intersectionality.

### Use Groups/Change Groups

Increased peer-to-peer interaction can help to close distance and tear down walls of separation. Make a point to incorporate small group work into your course for different things. For example, in a writing-heavy course, each student might have a reading group, a writing group, and a peer editing group. You can use the breakout function of your meeting app to make groups.

Interacting with peers in different ways allows students to know each other differently.

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## One Small Handout for Students, One Giant Leap for their Academic Success

“Using effective learning strategies during self-study is crucial for positive long-term learning outcomes and academic achievement. However, most students rely on ineffective strategies, such as rereading. Students are easily fooled by metacognitive illusions and mistakenly interpret short-term performance or ease-of-processing as reliable indicator [sic] for long-term learning.” (Biwer, oude Egbrink, Aalten, & de Bruin, 2020).

To help students identify which study strategies are effective and to suggest ways in which students can increase their chances of being academically successful, we created a study tips handout called, “Achieving Greater Academic Success with Less Stress.” The one-page handout, which can be downloaded [here](#), lists eight evidence-based study tips, each of which includes a brief description, written for an undergraduate student audience. The tips include:

1. Pay Attention
2. Skim, Listen, Read, Repeat
3. Study a Little a Lot
4. Don't Rote Memorize
5. Quiz Yourself
6. Take Care of Yourself
7. It Is Never Too Early
8. If at First You Don't Succeed, Try Something Else

We distribute this list to students in our courses as well as to incoming first-year students across the university, as they make the transition between the academic demands of high school and those of a college-level education.

### *References*

An extensive list of references that support the study tips included in our handout can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

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## Using Modules to Structure Your Online Course

Most learning management systems (LMS) offer the ability to build modules to organize course content into packages of information and activities. These modules resemble the structured units of a face-to-face course. Modules can be built as weeks or as units, depending on your needs.

When setting up modules, keep the following in mind:

- **Organize modules and items linearly**, such as by due date. This encourages students to complete tasks sequentially, especially if scaffolding assignments between and within modules.
- **Title your module clearly and specifically**. For example, consider using the number of the week, the dates for the module, and a title that indicates course content. For example: Week 3: Finding & Evaluating Sources.
- **Create a learning guide** that sits at the top of the module with the words “read this first” in it. In the learning guide:
  - Identify the learning goals for the module
  - Identify required reading(s), including page numbers and chapter titles
  - Indicate tasks, assignments, and their due dates
  - Share any other information or resources that may be useful to students
- **Design modules consistently** so students learn what to expect and where to go to access information, resources, discussions, and assignments. Be sure to use the same terms and language in each module so as not to confuse students.
- **Use section headers** to organize chunks of course content. For example, you could use them to separate direct instruction (reading, resources, videos, presentations) and active learning (discussion boards, quizzes/exams, projects).
- **Use indenting or nesting** to convey the module structure.
- **Title each module item** to describe what kind of activity it is; this lets students know what to expect. For example,
  - Video: Library Introduction
  - Discussion: Library Scavenger Hunt
  - Quiz: Finding & Evaluating Sources
- **Provide instruction about how students can navigate your course**. For example, provide an orientation that previews the module structure.

### Submitted by:

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## SOTD – Song of the Day!

I ask the class for their SOTD after posting mine. I post the YouTube link for my SOTD and provide instruction on how the students can use the LMS to post their song in the discussion forum. I use SOTD as a tool for social presence and building community in the online classroom. It is also a way for me to share part of my story as the professor and increase my musical diversity.

[Here is my SOTD:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr0tTbTbmVA) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr0tTbTbmVA>)

So, what's your SOTD?

Another resource is our [Educator Resources Page](https://www.moreheadstate.edu/Academic-Affairs/Undergraduate-Education-and-Student-Success/Faculty-Center-for-Teaching-and-Learning/Professional-Development), which links to our Online Teaching Strategies & Tools Newsletters (<https://www.moreheadstate.edu/Academic-Affairs/Undergraduate-Education-and-Student-Success/Faculty-Center-for-Teaching-and-Learning/Professional-Development>)

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## Walking Meetings

(**Advising** is a form of teaching that often goes ignored when we talk about instructional practice. And yet the relationship building, agenda setting, information transfer, and guidance provided during advising meetings represents “teaching” in one of its most impactful forms.)

**Consider replacing office hours with walking meetings.** I conducted walking meetings with all of my advisees for a number of years rather than having traditional one-on-one stationary meetings. In addition to contributing to our overall wellness, the benefits of walking meeting include a more relaxed conversational tone once outside of a formal academic office, and a reduction in the occasional awkwardness of face to face meetings as relationships are being established. Additionally, a set circular route includes visual reminders along the way of topics to cover with each student, and a visual end point to signal to participants that the conversation is wrapping up. An additional benefit during the time of COVID-19 is of course that outdoor, in-motion interactions reduce the danger of spreading the virus.

Walking meetings work best in nice weather, though indoor laps around a building are a viable alternative. They also work best for meeting of two individuals, where there isn't a pressing need for privacy. They would not be appropriate in a crisis, or to deal with highly complex issues that may require note-taking or reference to online resources.

### **Submitted by:**

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## Rethink Your Accommodations Statement

Over the past decade, faculty developers have advised faculty to [adopt warmer, more inclusive language](#) in their syllabi as a way of making more students, but especially first-generation and marginalized students, feel welcomed into the community of a course and university. However, even as faculty integrate the principles of the universal design for learning, the accommodations sections of too many syllabi remain cold, slightly softened versions of boilerplate statements vetted by university lawyers.

Instead of approaching disability as a deficit that needs to be remediated, faculty might rewrite their statements to explain how the course has been designed to not only meet all students' needs, but allow them to achieve at high levels. What specific steps will you take, for example, to ensure all students, regardless of ability, can access and understand course materials, engage with course materials and other students in the course, and demonstrate new skills and knowledge to you in ways that are accessible and equitable? For example, have you ensured all videos are captioned, and will you turn on captions when you screen a video during class?

Then:

- Have thoughtful colleagues and former students offer feedback on your statement.
- Instead of calling titling this section "accommodations," use language that reflects equity and inclusion, such as "This class was designed with *you* in mind."
- To emphasize its importance, move the statement closer to the front of your syllabus, rather than relegating it to the end, near penalties for late work and plagiarism.

Of course, you need to back up your access statement with pedagogical practices that uphold its promise. Examine the rest of your syllabus, your course materials, and your assessments to see if they're grounded in what disability historian Cathy Kudlick describes as "ableist notions of competence grounded in late-industrial capitalism," as "'Measuring up,' 'pulling one's full weight,' and countless other expressions we use to evaluate . . . bear the unmistakable imprint of industrial capitalism's unrelenting insistence" on "fitness and punctuality." In what ways might you have inadvertently set ableist expectations that prioritize, for example, students' stamina, focus, memory, or efficiency, even when those qualities aren't represented in your course or program learning outcomes?

### Learn more

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## Build Community and Presence in the Remote Instruction Context

With the shift to remote instruction, teaching strategies and interactions with students has changed dramatically. Faculty accustomed to building community in a face-to-face environment need to find alternative strategies to connect with students. One of the simplest strategies to connect with students in the current context of remote instruction is to simply check in with students and ask how they are doing.

Both faculty and students must adjust to the new learning environment in many ways. Jobs and income may be disrupted for many students. In addition to working on classwork at home, faculty and students may be supervising children and their learning activities or tending to the needs of older relatives or neighbors who must limit their social activities. Some might be experiencing symptoms.

Create a mechanism for students to tell you how they are doing and what is and is not helping them learn. Acknowledge that this is no longer “business as usual” and discuss the steps we can take as a community to make this work as best we can.

Whenever we try something new in a course (and we are all trying lots of new things now), it is always a good idea to ask students how the new learning experience worked for them. This is not a “customer satisfaction” survey: Don’t ask whether students *liked* the experience (few of us like what is happening these days). Instead, ask whether the changes *helped them learn*. Ask what modification would *help them learn better*. When possible, make adjustments that make sense and promise to improve the learning experience.

### Other strategies to build community and promote learning

- Write explicit and clear instructions for your expectations for assignments. For example, what should students write for an initial post in a discussion thread and what should they do differently when they post a follow up post? Explain what you expect in a thread that is a *discussion* (and exchange of ideas) rather than a series of independent posts.
- Communicate the *why* for an assignment. For example, what is the *purpose* of posts to a discussion thread? What should students learn from the exchange of ideas in the discussion thread? What skills will they practice? Must they learn to support assertions with scholarly evidence (versus posting expressions of opinions or feelings)?
- Create variety in the prompts you create for discussion posts. Avoid using the same-old-same-old “comment and respond to a question” format for every discussion thread.

### Consider alternative assignments to engage students:

- Keep “lectures” short. Divide an hour-long lecture on three big ideas into three short videos, one devoted to each big idea. Shorter recorded material is kinder to internet bandwidth, which may be limited in students’ homes. Create short demonstrations. For example, record a screen capture of yourself searching for articles in a library database, solving a problem and showing step-by-step work on a tablet or white board.
- Invite a guest lecturer (easier with technology than arranging for a classroom visit). If possible, ask the guest to participate in a Q&A asynchronous discussion thread.
- Create explicit, transparent information about assignments. Identify the *purpose* (in terms of learning goals), describe the steps required to complete the assignment, describe the criteria you will use when you evaluate the work.

- Record feedback for all students about assignments. Describe the common strengths and problem areas you observed in the work. Include a written summary of the feedback that students can skim quickly (versus watching an entire video again). The summary also ensures the feedback is ADA compliant.
- Vary learning tasks. Assign group work, whole class discussion, and small group discussion with independent work. Follow independent work with a blog presentation or some other mechanism for students to explain their project and interact with the whole class or a small group (e.g., through a peer review activity).
- One-on-one meetings with students can be time-consuming, but are effective ways to connect with online students, give feedback, and build community. Set up a time to schedule through a google sheet. Ask students to set up their conversation space and join their session instead of creating one space that students join. This strategy allows you to avoid having a student “barge into” a private conversation with another student.

## Resources

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## Encouraging Participation and Collaboration in Zoom

Using Zoom as a virtual classroom environment can present a number of challenges specifically as it pertains to student engagement. However, Zoom also provides tools that can be used creatively to help encourage in-class participation and collaboration among groups.

### Breakout Rooms for Simulations

For many of us who typically run simulations within a course, managing that through Zoom can have some advantages. For example, if the simulation requires students to work in independent teams, breakout rooms allow teams to work simultaneously and independently. These breakout rooms can also be setup to close after a set time and an instructor can move between breakout rooms to monitor group progress. Another helpful feature is the chat box. This can minimize instructor interruptions for things like correcting inaccurate information and providing clarity for questions that arise during the simulation.

In sum, Zoom can help instructors facilitate simulations because it:

- **Provides breakout rooms that can be timed.**
- **Allows the host to move from breakout room to breakout room.**
- **Contains chat functionality that allows for instructors to correct factually inaccurate information, provide additional details to participants, or steer the simulation back on track with minimum interruptions.**

### Whiteboards in Group Activities

In some disciplines, specifically those in STEM, whiteboards within breakout rooms can be used by students to draw diagrams of complex concepts or for working on mathematical computations. However, whiteboards can be just as useful in other disciplines as well. For example, whiteboards work well for group mind mapping activities where students visually diagram complex information like a historical figure's motivations or a literary character's emotions. It can also be used to allow students to brainstorm about a particular topic. To do this on the whiteboard, participants use the annotations tool. A key feature within annotations is the ability for a student's contribution to be notated on the whiteboard itself. Lastly, whiteboards can be saved within a break out room and shared with the rest of the class.

In sum, Zoom can help instructors facilitate break out room activities using whiteboard because it:

- **Allows multiple students to annotate on the whiteboard simultaneously.**
- **Can record student contributions on the whiteboard.**
- **Provides the capability for whiteboards to be saved**

### Virtual Meeting Spaces

You can set up a recurring Zoom meeting for groups to enter a Zoom room, and once the students finish their meeting, you can have a recording of the meeting sent to you through the Zoom cloud. This can be particularly useful if you want students to engage in discussions outside of class about course content or if you have assigned them group projects. For example, in a political science course, you may assign a group of students to discuss a particular policy issue in a podcast format.

In sum, Zoom can help instructors create virtual meeting spaces because it:

- **Provides a flexible space where student can enter a Zoom room at an agreed upon time.**
- **Can be setup so that recordings are automatic and sent to the cloud.**

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## Engage Students in Active Learning Asynchronously

Asynchronous teaching techniques can help meet challenges students encounter in participating remotely in synchronous (or real-time) class meetings. While some students may be experiencing a course face-to-face in a physical classroom, those joining remotely via video may have challenges from differing time zones, zoom fatigue, bandwidth struggles and other limitations in their home environment. Learning involves the active construction of meaning by the learner; therefore, activities that allow students to do things and think about what they are doing (so called active learning activities) are critical to facilitating students learning regardless of the modality of instruction. To meet these challenges, faculty can create asynchronous learning opportunities that allow students engage in activities at varying times and to participate at their own pace.

Asynchronous learning opportunities can connect students with an online class community. This fall, when some students may be remote and all students are facing challenges due to inequity, COVID-19, and general uncertainty, one of the most important things our courses can provide is opportunities for connection. Research has demonstrated that in online courses, creating this sense of community and belonging is critical to student persistence.

Here are some tips for including asynchronous learning techniques in your class:

### Use online discussions to build community & deepen learning

- Asynchronous discussions can provide students opportunities for connection with you, their peers and with content by using images, videos, and Voice Threads in addition to words. Discussions offer an opportunity for you to know all of your students and how they think.
- Within discussions learners can actively synthesize new information with prior knowledge and experiences, then participate in creating new knowledge and coming to a deeper understanding of their own learning. For more see the [Virtual Teaching Tip: Asynchronous Discussions](#) (Teaching@Tufts)

### Use quizzes for timely engagement with course materials

- Low stakes or no-stakes quizzes can help students discover what they know and what they don't know, while providing instant feedback to the instructor about what their students are learning. A variety of studies have shown that reading quizzes in college courses can help improve the quality of class discussions and increase student exam grades.
- Quizzes improve student learning by prompting students to reflect on the material as they learn it and encouraging them to space their studying. This helps them integrate and build upon previous content.
- Quizzes can consist of simple multiple-choice questions that target a variety of learning levels, or they can include more open-ended reflections. The type of questions you use may be guided by the content of the course, the class size, and to what extent you wish to use auto-graded question types. For more see [Writing and Revising Multiple Choice Questions](#) (Teaching@Tufts Blog)
- Canvas's Quiz tool allows for easy integration with your course gradebook, or if you are already using a tool like Poll Everywhere, [surveys](#) can be set up so that students can participate asynchronously.

## Use peer feedback to foster learning & connections

- In providing peer feedback, students gain a peer audience for the work they produce -while learning processes of self-regulation and self-assessment that increase their ability to judge their own work. In receiving peer feedback, students gain multiple perspectives on their work and suggestions for improving it.
- Peer feedback can be integrated into any formative assessment, such as homework assignments, written work, presentations, or student project drafts. Useful feedback tasks prompt students to ask questions of the work submitted to probe ideas or reflect back perspectives such as restating a peer's thesis.
- Guide peer feedback with training on how to provide useful feedback. This might include students comparing their feedback to an 'exemplar' example, guidance on productive ways to offer feedback, the application of rubrics or guiding questions, or instructor 'feedback' on the feedback they provide.
- Students are often concerned about their ability (and that of their peers) to accurately assess work. Consider assigning any peer grading tasks to no-stakes (ungraded) or low-stakes assignments. You can assign multiple peer graders to each assignment, have graders use credit/no credit marking, and allow students to request a review of their grade.

## Use groups to connect students in collaborative work

- Groups encourage student participation, foster relationships and a sense of belonging in a class, and allow students to learn from each other while engaging in collaborative problem-solving. Students can work remotely with their group using a variety of synchronous and asynchronous tools– from emails, discussions and chat spaces to social media or phone and video calls. Suggest ways for students to connect while still providing the flexibility to allow small groups of students to use the tools they are most comfortable with.
- Introduce students to the purpose of the group work so that they will see the value in engaging with their peers.
- [Guide the formation of groups](#), starting with initial guidelines for engagement, an initial small task, or an opportunity to get to know each other (e.g., [U Minnesota's Surviving Group Projects](#)).
- Set regular check-ins with the group including assigning deadlines with deliverables or opportunities for groups to share progress with the rest of the class, along with a mid-semester process check-in to identify any structural problems early on.
- See [Helping students work in groups remotely](#) (*Teaching@Tufts Blog*) for more on using groups.

These techniques can be used in classes that are fully remote, those that primarily meet face-to-face, or have a mixture of different modalities. Whichever activities you choose to design, focus on connecting students to opportunities to practice and apply what they are learning and build community with each other and you.

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## Teaching Large Classes Online

The definition of a “large class” may differ based on discipline, assessments, and activities, but I would consider any class with more than 50 students to be a large enrollment course. These courses particularly rely on traditional face-to-face sessions to deliver instruction, assessment, and gauge overall group understanding. So how does this happen online--are there ways to translate familiar strategies, or should we consider new course structures in light of COVID-19? This teaching tip offers ways to make large courses manageable and engaging whether you use synchronous or asynchronous activities.

### Course Logistics

- Plan a strategy for feasibly managing student questions, as you’ll likely get many more than in a face-to-face course and will take more time to manage. See our recent [Managing Student Questions Online Teaching Tips](#) for multiple strategies.
- The best way to curtail questions is to provide a lot of structure and explicit directions. Even though students have now had some experience online, taking a fully online course will still be new territory for many students. Explaining a little more than you would in a real-time situations helps students who cannot ask immediate questions and receive immediate answers.
- Winter semester required a rushed solution to moving final exams and other assessments online. What will change or stay the same this semester? Whatever assessments you decide best fit the course learning outcomes and our current learning context, provide students low-stakes assessments using the same tool so that students have less anxiety and tech issues as the stakes rise. For more recommendations, see the [Examination and Assessment Guide](#) (updates pending for Summer 2020 semesters).

### Synchronous Sessions

When run well, synchronous sessions can be helpful learning opportunities that build community and accountability. That being said, education experts highly encourage making synchronous sessions optional or not imposing attendance policies, as everyone’s life schedules and responsibilities have been disrupted. Recording synchronous sessions or offering narrated slides makes these sessions accessible to those who could not participate.

Many ideas from our recent [Tips for Synchronous Online Sessions](#) ring true for large courses: setting explicit expectations and rules, using breakout rooms, using Google Docs to structure live activities, opening the chat the whole class, having students annotate your WebEx whiteboard, using the Raise Hand icon. I have heard suggestions for using the chat to elicit simple responses to questions or ways of taking the class temperature, such as rating understanding on a simple scale or providing multiple choice questions.

If your teaching style relies on more detailed real-time, feedback and facilitating more discussion, a flipped classroom model might provide more options. A flipped classroom “flips” the model of traditional instruction: rather than reserving synchronous sessions for lecture and independent time for practice, students view instructional videos on their own time and then use class time to work through “homework” activities. [OU School of Business faculty Kieran Mathieson gives a great 2-minute explanation of flipped classrooms and their benefits](#). If you have instructional resources available, such

as publicly available videos on your topic, your own instructional videos, or narrated slides, you could then use smaller segments of synchronous time to meet with groups of students to review practice problems or go through simulations.

### Asynchronous Activities

Among many decisions [a Virginia Tech Professor made in re-designing a large class during COVID](#), a key decision was to make the entirety comprised of asynchronous activities. With limited time for instructors to translate courses to best leverage online learning, asynchronous course design may be more accessible to both students and instructors. Asynchronous does not mean without engagement, but allows learners more flexibility on when they engage with course material.

Here are some suggestions in moving to more asynchronous activities:

Identify a cadre of threshold concepts and offer brief guides on these topics, either created by others or by you.

[Viji Sathy, award-winning faculty who teaches stats, explains more at this point in a fantastic webinar on microlectures](#). Depending on the nature of these concepts and what students are expected to do with these concepts, you could also reinforce them with multimedia, like five-minute videos or longer audio files (i.e. podcasts). [MERLOT](#) provides an incredible amount of open instructional content, and OU Libraries can assist in navigating this and other instructional resources.

Build in “check your knowledge” activities before, during, or after activities.

These activities do not necessarily have to be graded or reviewed, but provide students more feedback on whether they are “getting it” or on track.

- **Make prior knowledge visible with a pre-session activity.** The Q & A forum structure can be a great way to ask a preliminary question, as students can't see one another's responses until they post their own. Having students make their thinking visible helps them see what they know and don't know. Dr. Billie Franchini provides more context in her guide [Making Online Discussions Part of a Cycle of Learning](#).
- **Prompt students with questions right in videos.** The [Interactive Video feature within H5P activity](#) available in Moodle is a robust, simple tool for embedding questions right in a video, whether it's a YouTube video or an uploaded video. (Those without an H5P capability can create this and more activities at [h5p.org](#).)
- **At the end of instructional material or activities, ask students one “exit” question.** This strategy, often called “muddiest point,” gives students 1-2 minutes to write and submit what they would like to review or practice more. This feedback can help guide feedback and future instructional material. This exit question can also be used in synchronous class sessions.

If using discussion forums, develop strategies for showing thoughtful review without responding to every single forum post.

Students gain a lot of motivation to participate in class when they know their instructors are reading and responding, but this instructor presence doesn't require responding to every post. Instructors take many approaches to making forum responses more manageable.

- **Split forums into threads you create, and allow students to choose among threads.** These threads can make it easier to organize and navigate posts [See an example of this forum structure in the Hybrid Teaching eSpace.](#)
- **Charge students to review one another's posts, with instructions and examples.** Teaching students to provide generative feedback is an important life skill, but also the gift that keeps giving in an online course. If you give a lot of direction, structure, and examples upfront, and require substantive feedback to receive credit, students will receive more feedback than they would otherwise receive from you alone. For more strategies, see [Frame Your Feedback: Making Peer Review Work in Class.](#)
- **Write a synthesized review of posts.** Rather than responding to each post, read all posts through, making notes of similarities, differences, particularly important points, good examples, etc. Then, wrap up the conversation with a post that synthesizes the whole conversation, noting students by name as appropriate.

You course might also blend synchronous and asynchronous elements based on your course, your students, your teaching approach, among other factors. [Inside Higher Ed's 15 Fall Scenarios](#) provides a variety of course structures, and some may ring more authentic and best for facilitating learning than others. [HyFlex](#), a newer buzz word adaptable online teaching, essentially gives students full choice on how to engage in a course: attend on-campus sessions, attend via live stream, or engage in the course asynchronously. [Higher ed scholar Claire Major reflected that she had long facilitated a "HyFlex" course structure before she knew there was a term for it.](#)

All this to say, teaching during COVID-19 is not only the challenge to teach online during a global crisis, but also the opportunity to reflect on how learning happens in your courses.

#### Additional Resources

[Active Learning in Large Classrooms: Teaching Resources](#): Compiles a topic-specific resources from CETL and beyond in a variety of formats.

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## Tips for Online Classroom Management

*Being a spectator not only deprives one of participation, but also leaves one's mind free for unrelated activity. If academic learning does not engage students, something else will. --John Goodlad*

Effective classroom management is a key determinant for learning whether the latter takes place in a physical classroom or in a virtual space. However, instructors often encounter challenges in managing classrooms in ways that can facilitate learning, particularly if the class is online. Below are eight tips and strategies to effectively manage your virtual classroom environment.

1. **Set rules and expectations ahead of time:** Establish clear rules and expectations with your students regarding punctuality, dress code, participation, and appropriate language/ expressions for virtual classrooms to avoid any confusions and/or embarrassments.
2. **Establish and reiterate routines:** Although virtual classrooms provide flexibility of time and place, it is important to establish, communicate and maintain a predictable course pattern or routine of course-related activities so as to provide structure.
3. **Build community:** Have team building activities in your virtual classroom for participants to learn about each other, to learn about you, and to find commonalities in your experiences as a group to strengthen student-faculty and student-student relationships.
4. **Create a conducive environment for learning:** Create a delightful and friendly atmosphere in your virtual classroom. Make virtual spaces to serve different purposes, for example, a “lounge or chat room” for discussions or a “parking lot area” for questions that can be answered by you and fellow participants.
5. **Follow the 5-minute rule:** It can be challenging to maintain your learners’ attention and engagement throughout the online session due to countless distractions. One way to address this issue is engage your learners every five minutes in order to keep them actively participating in the session. You can do this by asking them to recap key ideas, encouraging them to offer their input in the chat box, randomly calling upon them to answer a question, or even by asking them to summarize the discussion.
6. **Be present:** Show your constant presence in the classroom by connecting with your learners, responding to their queries and concerns, and providing feedback to the tasks.
7. **Deal with discipline issues in the virtual classroom immediately:** Prevent disciplinary issues in your class by reminding learners time and again about the classroom norms. If you encounter learners breaking the class norms, talk to them privately immediately after class to figure out the causes of their actions.
8. **Plan for the unplanned:** Have a backup plan for every activity you plan to conduct in your virtual classroom. Develop, plan and share the lesson plan with your learners to manage any unforeseen interruptions to the lesson delivery.

An easy way to remember all the above is by using the: **CREATOR**

**C**–Community building

**R**–Rules setting

**E**–Engaging learners with 5-minute rule

**A**–Affirm classroom norms

**T**–Teacher presence

**O**–Offer friendly and conducive environment

**R**–Reiterate routine

**Resource:** Ragan, L. C. (n.d.). [10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education](https://www.facultyfocus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/10-Principles-of-Effective-Online-Teaching.pdf). Magna Publications. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/10-Principles-of-Effective-Online-Teaching.pdf>

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## Mid-class “Share and Compare” Activity Teaches Better Note-Taking Skills

When students are surveyed about note-taking, they frequently report that they wished they took better notes (Morehead, Dunlosky, Rawson, Blasiman, & Hollis, 2019). Students recognize the value of taking good notes, but few report having ever been taught how to take effective notes. Moreover, students who did receive formal instruction on how to take notes often got this instruction in middle school or high school, where the advice might not apply well to the needs of college students.

### What is good note taking?

Good note-taking is a *learning strategy* that engages students with effortful processing of lecture content rather than passive listening. An effective note-taker evaluates, prioritizes, and organizes lecture content. Effective notes distinguish important ideas from less-important details, organize content, and articulate how ideas relate to each other.

Taking good notes is a complex cognitive skill. Although the mere act of writing things down can improve memory, skilled note-takers also listen actively, determine which content is important enough to record, and organize the new content in a meaningful, coherent way (Reed, Rimel, & Hallett, 2016). Unskilled note-takers take less complete notes. They may fail to record as much as half of the important information. Their notes are poorly organized or they may fail to reflect how main ideas relate to supporting details.

### Paper versus laptop? Does the medium make a difference?

Students who use a laptop to take notes might create distractions (for other students as well as themselves) if they also use the laptop for off-task activities. However, providing students with multiple options for taking notes increases the accessibility of the classroom. Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014) suggest that taking notes on paper minimizes distraction. They argue that the slow process of writing forces a student to record notes selectively and engage more deeply with lecture content. In contrast, they suggest that skilled typists taking notes on a laptop might passively transcribe lecture content verbatim without thinking deeply (or thinking at all) about the meaning of the material presented. However, taking notes on a laptop does not prevent students from engaging deeply in lecture content (Morehead, Dunlosky, & Rawson, 2019). At present, the decision to use paper or a laptop to take notes is best determined by characteristics of the student (typing skill, quality and speed of handwriting) and characteristics of the content (e.g., should notes include drawings, graphs, diagrams, or complex equations).

### Student misconceptions about class notes

Although students often report that they take notes in their face-to-face classes, more than half say that they do not take notes during online lectures (Morehead, Dunlosky, Rawson, Blasiman, & Hollis, 2019). Students may undervalue note-taking if they believe the purpose of notes is only to transcribe lecture content. Thus, students in a face-to-face class might not take notes if their notes would duplicate PowerPoint slides or other materials posted online. Similarly, students in online classes might believe that they do not need to take notes if they can always view the lecture again (the content is always available). However, Morehead et al. argue that reviewing online lectures is analogous to rereading the textbook, which is well-established as an ineffective study strategy (Dunlosky, et al., 2013).

## Mid-Lecture Pause to Share and Compare Notes

Instructors can help students learn to take better notes if they introduce a note sharing activity midway through their lectures. Like other skills, note-taking improves when students have multiple opportunities to practice and receive feedback. Schedule a “share and compare” activity during several lectures throughout the term (Rice, 2018; Ruhl, Hughes, & Schloss, 1987). With repetition, students will learn about general principles of effective note-taking and not just correct their notes for a particular lecture.

Tell students at the start of class that you will take a short break in the middle of class for sharing class notes with a neighbor. Explain the rules for the activity the first time you use this activity in class.

- **Individual reflection on class notes.** Take 2-3 minutes to review your notes. Fill in blanks or add ideas you did not have time to write down earlier.
- **Work in small groups (2-3 students).** Turn to a neighbor and compare notes. Ask questions and clarify areas where notes differ. Identify gaps such as key ideas or supporting details you did not record but a classmate did. Correct errors or misunderstandings. Clarify which ideas are most important. Organize a coherent argument: explain how the main ideas are supported by evidence. NOTE: Some instructors walk around the room and listen in on the student conversations to identify common areas that need clarification.
- **Instructor clarification.** At the end of three minutes, the class can ask questions to clarify their notes before resuming the lecture. If a frequent area of confusion emerges, use this time to discuss and clarify.

## Resources

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**Submitted by:**

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## Help Students Develop their Own Values, Beliefs, and Opinions

Decades ago, Palmer (1998) reminded us that teaching is a moral enterprise. “We teach who we are,” he wrote (p. 2). Because effective teaching begins with strong student-teacher relationships, being genuine with our students seems like a good thing. And it is. But teaching – like everything else we do – is value-laden. We often reveal our personal values when we teach, sometimes without even realizing it, simply by what we say or the words we choose (Auburn University, n.d.; Roche, 2009). In worst cases, we intentionally push our personal values onto our students both directly and indirectly by providing unbalanced coverage of multi-faceted issues, offering (or not offering) praise or acknowledgement, or expressing our personal viewpoints so strongly that students who disagree are silenced.

Teachers are certainly entitled to their own values, beliefs, and opinions; but we must not indoctrinate – or attempt to change – our students’ values, beliefs, and opinions through our work as teachers (Gooblar, 2019; OAJ, 2020). It is professionally unethical to use our classrooms or our authority as teachers to force students’ adoption of what we think they should believe. The professional responsibility of teachers is to promote knowledge and skill within our academic disciplines, including learning standards, accreditation requirements, and course objectives (Gooblar, 2019; OAJ, 2020). Through the teaching of our academic disciplines, we can – and should – provide rich, balanced, and non-judgmental opportunities for students to develop their own values, beliefs, and opinions (Elias, 2017; Roche, 2009) – even when they do not align with ours.

### Resources

- Auburn University (n.d.). [Value-laden words](http://www.auburn.edu/pctl/models/Reading/nothingbut/valueladen.html). Retrieved from <http://www.auburn.edu/pctl/models/Reading/nothingbut/valueladen.html>
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### Submitted by:

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## Ideas for Online Discussions

Given the teaching scenarios for Fall 2020 and the increased likelihood that many of our class discussions will occur online (synchronously and/or asynchronously), having well planned guiding questions and discussion strategies can help improve the probability of good discussions.

Here are some of the different types of questions that can be used to support discussion:

- Real-Word Inquiry:
  - Assess - What is the issue or problem at hand?
  - Diagnose - What is the root cause of this issue or problem?
  - Act - What can we do as individuals or as a society to solve the issue? Ask your students to make connections and identify differences between ideas that can be found in class texts and materials.
- Author's Claim:
  - Interpret - What is the author's central claim or argument?
  - Evaluate - Are you convinced by this argument / evidence? Why?
- Building Arguments:
  - Claim - Ask students to make a claim to support their argument.
  - Reasoning - Ask students to provide rationale behind their claim.
  - Evidence - Ask students for credible evidence to support their claim.
- Compare and Contrast: Ask your students to make connections and identify differences between ideas that can be found in class texts and materials.
- Ethical Dilemmas: Provide students with a problem or situation, and ask them to explore one or more of the moral and ethical concerns.
- Personal Exploration: Let students explore a new idea on their own terms. This creative freedom helps them find their authentic voice. "What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean to you?" or "Find an example of \_\_\_\_\_ in your own life".
- Reflection: Ask students to reflect on an experience such as a lab, film, or reading. "What struck you at the time?" "What stuck with you after?"

Question types to avoid:

- Yes/No Questions: Any question that can be answered with a simple yes or no tends to limit the depth and complexity of the discussion that ensues.
- Elliptical Questions- This is the opposite of the yes/no error. If you start with "What do you think about..." it often means the question is vague and won't provide enough structure for your students.
- Leading Questions: These questions have a bias built right in, and discourage students from taking risks with their ideas. An example might be: "Don't you think that..." or "Wouldn't you agree with that."
- Slanted questions: These questions are subtle. They indirectly "close down" a student that may not agree with the implied assumption. An example might be: "Why was this person so corrupt?"

Student discussion strategies: These recommendations are inspired by Stephen Brookfield's conversational moves from *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*. He is a great resource for short & simple

strategies to improve student engagement with both the course materials and the overall class. Sharing these strategies with students can help them engage and promote

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in another's comments
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages someone else to elaborate on something he or she has said.
- Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions. Make this link explicit in your comment.
- Contribute something that builds on or springs from what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts.
- Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions and that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion.
- Express appreciation for how others comments have helped your understanding
- Point to a specific passage in the assigned text that is particularly helpful either to illuminate or to problematize the current direction of the discussion.

C.f. Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, 2nd edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

**Submitted by:**

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## Student Choice in Online Discussions

My discussions run for two weeks with two discussions overlapping one another. So, you have an "old" discussion (from the previous week) and a "new" discussion for the current week. Students have a choice of participating in one or both discussions each week. Having choices helps students take ownership of the course. "No one ever washes a rental car."

Students also need to contribute posts on at least two separate days during each Monday-Sunday week cycle.

### Directions to students:

Reminder: We have two discussions open this week and in future weeks – the new discussion and the one from the previous week. Your posts and replies will count for participation in either week's discussion. So, if you want to continue contributing to last week's discussion, any new posts in last week's discussion will count for points this week. If you want to just participate in this week's discussion, that's fine. And if you want to participate in both last week's and this week's discussions, all that participation will count for points this week. But you still need to contribute posts on at least two different days to get all the participation points for the week. For determining participation points, we count posts in each Monday-Sunday cycle.

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## Lessons Learned from the Discussion Board

The first time I taught an online class (for undergraduates) I naturally made use of that ubiquitous online learning strategy – the discussion board. I was used to engaging in discussion boards (DB's) in my own online doctoral courses, and found the exchanges to be rich, deep conversations concerning things I was passionate about.

Imagine my surprise when the DB's in my course flopped. Never had I read more banal comments from a clearly uninterested group of would-be scholars. My disappointment easily could have led me to abandon DB's for online courses, but especially in asynchronous classes, they seem to be an essential method of getting students to 'talk' to each other.

So, what can the professor of undergraduate students do to raise the level of the DB? I returned to my roots as a K-12 teacher and remembered the importance of scaffolding. Build support for students learning a new skill into your instruction. The goal is for students to gradually gain independence in completing a new and complex task.

First, don't just tell students discussion has to be robust. Explain AND demonstrate what that means. A *rubric can help define levels of quality*, and *sample discussion posts* can show what quality looks like. Also remember to *give feedback*. Not just a grade, but targeted specific comments that explain to students how they can improve. And then *give them multiple opportunities to try again*. Continue to provide feedback, examples, and opportunities for practice until students begin to master the skill. These supports can all be phased out (remove the scaffolding) as students demonstrate growth.

For the record, I do not think DB's are the only or the most important tool to use in online teaching. I believe variety helps keep both instructor and student engaged. But DB's are one tool in your repertoire, and with the right support, students can learn both content and skill by engaging in them well.

### **Submitted by:**

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## Making Group Work Less Painful

Groups assignments are among the most dreaded by students, even as professional educators we know they enable students to make social connections with classmates, practice peer-to-peer learning, and apply knowledge. Here are some quick tips for making group work less painful:

- Make sure the group assignment is sufficiently complex that it's worth the extra cognitive effort of working in a group! This is equally true for short 10-minute group discussions and larger projects spanning the whole term.
- Give very clear directions. You know what you want them to do, but once multiple brains read the instructions, vagueness will open the door to creative interpretations of the instructions resulting in a learning experience that fails to meet the learning objective. Also, groups will spend valuable time determining what they should do rather than doing it.
- Include a guide or reference for students on how to be successful in a group. Students may not have mastered the skills of what it takes to make a successful group, and giving them some tools can help them succeed. This is especially true in longer or more elaborate group projects. Tips can include:
  - Have at least one meeting or video conference at the start of the project.
  - Start your meeting by reviewing the assignment.
    - Does everyone understand the assignment?
    - Do everyone understand what the due date(s) are?
    - Do anyone have any questions?
  - What technology will you use to communicate and share materials?
  - How do you expect people to behave?
  - What are all the parts or steps of the project?
    - Consider everyone's strengths and interests in assigning parts of the project.
  - What action will the group take if someone does not do their part?

Creating a strong group assignment and giving students tools to proactively handle group dynamics will help ease the stress of group assignments.

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A&I's online teaching resources: [Teaching Toolkit](#)

## Perspective-taking Exercise

Developing the ability to see perspectives is an important in learning to think and collaborating with others. How can we see what others see? For this activity, participants should be seated around a table with an assortment of objects, some smaller, some bigger, some hidden behind the bigger items (Such as a backpack, hardcover books, a ball, pencil etc.). Cover up the whole table with a tablecloth or a sheet and start the perspective-taking exercise by having everyone draw what they see in front of them. Place the objects in the middle of the room and have learners sitting around with all the objects covered with a sheet.

### Directions:

- In the middle of a circle, place a table with an assortment of objects. Cover up the whole table with a sheet.
- Place learners around and have them sketch on a piece of paper what they see.
- Compare the drawings by having learners walk around after placing the drawings on their chairs facing the center of the room. Encourage free responding to what they see, what drawings have brought out.
- Discuss together in a large group what people noticed when they walked around the circle

The purpose of this activity is to articulate observations, to discuss similarities and differences, connecting viewpoints with visual perspectives. This activity can be done with any content area and works well as a beginning activity in courses. It can be used as an anchor activity, a common experience that can be referred to later in the semester. It increases social interaction and collaboration as a shared experience. Other benefits and issues you can bring up:

- Learners see things differently and different views are “true”
- Building empathy and recognizing differences
- Collaboration is worth it, even if you don’t know what will happen, something will
- Repeat the activity and check what is being remembered a week later
- In our society we tend to lose the ability to be “seen”. We are trained to look at louder things... visually and auditorily. Subtle and less obvious things matter also in relationships, learning and knowledge building
- It requires intentionality, and personal action (walking around to see the views that were hidden from the original place of seating) to be able to see perspectives.

### Resource:

Antola Crowe, H., Nugent, P., Parks, R., Hart, K., Power Murphy, E., & Weiss, M. (2017). Collaborative strategies enhancing social-emotional growth in the classroom. In J. Bakken (Ed.) *Classrooms: Academic content and behavior strategy instruction for students with and without disabilities, Vol. 2.* (pp. 147 – 169). NY: Nova Publishers.

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## Writing into the Unknown

“We write about what we don’t know about what we know.” --Grace Paley

In this statement, and throughout her life, Grace Paley challenged writers to use the power of writing as a tool of inquiry and discovery. Paley eschewed the common dictum that writers should “write about what they know,” and defined writing itself as a process whereby writers surpass what they know, forging, in the process, new domains of knowledge (which are themselves destined to be similarly surpassed).

The interesting dynamic in Paley’s quote is the way it characterizes “what we know” as a kind of starting point or staging ground for the real task of writing: the incursion into the unknown. This sentiment seems particularly relevant at this time in history, when we are surrounded by “known unknowns.” The important questions about coronavirus are not only microbiological, medical, and epidemiological; they are also human questions – personal questions that can only be answered by deliberate, authentic, innovative ways of thinking. How will the pandemic re-shape our society? How will it influence the way we think about healthcare and education? How does it change the way we think about what it means to be biological entities inhabiting a troubled planet? We don’t know the answers to these questions – we *are* the answers. The ultimate answers to these questions are currently taking shape inside our thoughts and in our daily behaviors and conversations. It has never been more important, therefore, to use whatever tools are available to us to work our way into these unknowns, to pioneer new ways of thinking and communicating about this shared collective experience.

Early in the pandemic, my impulse was to try to stay focused on the preexisting curriculum and to maintain a sense of “business as usual.” So much of life had already been disrupted by the pandemic, I believed that the classroom could be a preserve of pre-pandemic normalcy. Several months later, I am experimenting with a new approach of encouraging students to use their writing to identify what they know about the pandemic, and then to speculate about what they don’t know, what they wish they knew, what they hope for, what they are afraid of, what they think will happen, what they think should happen, and what they can do with their writing, their minds, and their lives to respond to the ongoing crisis in a thoughtful responsible, and compassionate way.

There are many ways that teachers can foster this kind of focused inquiry. The easiest way to begin is with a classroom conversation (whether in person or through a conferencing app). Ask students to write down one thing they know about the pandemic, one thing they think they know but are not sure about, and one question that they can’t answer. While such a conversation is engaging, it can be particularly productive as a stimulant to a writing project that asks students to attempt to hash out their own responses to these questions and challenges. The process of pursuing these lines of thought in writing allows students to identify connections among disparate phenomena, to access their subconscious thoughts, and to dig deeper into their own assumptions. In short, a writing process that encourages students to “write into” the holes in what they know leverages the cognitive potency of writing to map out these holes, peer into them, and, perhaps, to gain some mastery over this mysterious and often frightening terrain.

In a way, the coronavirus pandemic provides a natural opportunity for writers to put Paley’s ideas into practice. These days, the unknown seems to have a palpable presence, hovering around the edges of everything in a way that can make it difficult to focus on anything else. For students and teachers of

writing, this condition can be a powerful provocation to confront the mystery, to use language as a vehicle for delving into it, and to return to the shores of the known with a better understanding of where and who we are as writers and as human beings.

### Resources

Murray, D. (2009). *The Essential Don Murray*. T. Newkirk and L. C. Miller, Eds. NY: Heinemann.

Paley, G. (1998). *Just as I Thought*. NY: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.

### **Submitted by:**

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## Reflective Elements Deepen Learning and Develop Cognitive Skills

In a busy world, people can get so caught up recording events (posting photos of fabulous meals, a child's recital, or vacation scenery on social media) that they neglect to experience the activity. Similarly, busy students may complete the assignment we craft to promote learning without noticing how the assignment promoted learning important disciplinary knowledge or skills. They will notice the time and effort the task required, but they might not notice the benefit for their learning.

A reflective activity forces students to make the implicit explicit (Hutchins, 2018; Lovitts, 2016; Winkelmes, et al., 2016). Reflective assignments require students to describe how an assignment promoted their learning and articulate the value of developing these skills. Reflective tasks help students develop metacognitive skills such as monitoring and directing activities that serve their learning goals, thereby promoting habits for life-long learning.

Do not assume that students know how to reflect on their experiences. Good reflective assignments include explicit instructions and prompts and guiding questions that structure the reflection. In the spirit of explicit, transparent assignments (Winkelmes, et al., 2016), the reflective assignment will also include a rubric that articulates how instructors will evaluate the reflection: elements students should include in the reflective paper and descriptions of quality. Formal evaluation of reflective assignments signals to students that these activities are valued – they “count” as meaningful and important parts of the learning experience (and course grade). In the absence of formal evaluation, students may come to regard the reflection as a hoop to jump through, busy work that does not contribute to the value of the class.

Hutchings (2018) describe four common features of effective reflective tasks. While good reflective tasks might not include every element, the more elements the reflective assignment includes, the more likely the task will be effective.

### Elements of effective reflective assignments

1. ***The assignment requires students to pay attention to the learning task and think about how it affected their thinking (and feeling).*** Attending to the task and one's learning begins with description. Many reflective assignments require students to identify and make components of the assignment explicit by describing what they did and how the activity was connected to learning goals. Ask students to *describe the thought processes they used to identify a problem addressed in the learning activity*. For a group assignment, ask students to *describe and evaluate their contribution to each part of the group project*.
2. ***Examine and evaluate the learning experience embedded in the assignment.*** Ask students to describe what they learned from the activity they are reflecting on. How have their skills or understanding of multiple perspectives on a problem changes as a result of their work on the project. Ask students to articulate why the learning is important for them as students in the discipline, as future professionals in the discipline, or as adults functioning in society after graduation. In some cases, students can reflect on meta-cognitive skills by writing guidelines and suggestions for future students who will complete the assignment in future terms. What did students learn from the task that they wished they had known going into it? What strategies can they suggest that will help future students complete the assignment successfully?

3. **Require students to integrate learning from the task with prior learning.** Many elements of reflective assignments are inward-looking. This element focuses more on the disciplinary content and skills embodied in the assignment. Ask students to evaluate the disciplinary methods and models they used for the task and their appropriateness for the problem addressed. The prompt might also ask students to connect their academic learning to their personal development (e.g., learning to work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds or individual who approach a problem from a different perspective, learning to deal with multiple, competing agendas when solving a problem).
4. **Articulate how skills acquired while completing the assignment will be relevant to future activities.** This element can be couched as a forward-looking prompt that requires students to discuss how the skills used to address the problem posed by the assignment might be used in the future. The future might be short term (how these skills will be used in future classes in the academic program) or long term (how these skills will be used when working in the discipline following graduation).

## Resources

Hutchings, P. (2018, June). [\*Helping students develop habits of reflection: What we can learn from the NILOA Assignment Library\*](#). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

[http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/Habits\\_Of\\_Reflection\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/Habits_Of_Reflection_FINAL.pdf)

Lovitts, B. E. (2006). Making the implicit explicit: Faculty's performance expectations for the dissertation. In P. L. Maki & N. A. Borkowski (Eds.), *The assessment of doctoral education* (pp. 163-187). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Winkelmess, M-A., Bernacki, M., Butler, J., Zochowski, M., Golanics, J., & Harris Weavil, K. (2016, Winter/Spring). A Teaching intervention that increases underserved college students' success. *Peer Review*, 18 (1/2), 31-36.

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## Notetaking for Effective Student Engagement in Online Classes

Online transition to teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic has posed a number of challenges for both faculty and students alike. One such challenge is students' engagement during and after online lessons. Learning requires mental engagement that can enable learners to store what they have learnt in their long-term memory. Notetaking is an important mental exercise for enabling student engagement and thus should be taught to learners like any other skill for online teaching. Here are a few tips on how to do so:

- Encourage students to carry writing materials (pen, pencils, color markers and writing sheets) for all classes online.
  - Encourage students to maintain notes by clearly indicating the reference to which the notes are made e.g. name of facilitator, subject date, topic, subtopic, lecture or video or podcast in series.
  - Teach them how to identify the key ideas and the points related to the identified key ideas as shared in the lecture, video or podcast.
  - Advise them to document notes in respective course files to keep records for future reference.
  - Urge them to review and clarify the recorded notes soon after the class and summarize them thereafter for revision during examination.
- Encourage them to share and discuss their notes with their peers to facilitate a deeper understanding of the topic or concept.
- For those students who are inclined to learning using visual images encourage them to sketch note. This allows the student to their thoughts with the use of illustrations, symbols, structures, and texts.

### Resources

Artz, B., Johnson, M., Robson, D., & Taengnoi, S. (2017). [Note-taking in the digital age: Evidence from classroom random control trials](http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3036455). <http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3036455>

Wu, J. Y., & Xie, C. (2018). [Using time pressure and note-taking to prevent digital distraction behavior and enhance online search performance: Perspectives from the load theory of attention and cognitive control](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.07.008). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 88, 244-254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.07.008>

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## Why Rereading Notes and Textbooks Is an Ineffective Way to Study

One of the most common study methods used by college students is rereading. Students often reread highlighted portions of their textbook, notes they took during class, and slides you presented in class. While rereading certainly can feel productive, it creates a feeling of familiarity which is often mistaken for actually knowing the material (a.k.a. “The Illusion of Knowing”). Thus, rereading is often a less effective way to study.

So what *is* a better way for students to study in order to ensure that they will be able to remember and understand course content? The answer is what cognitive scientists refer to as **retrieval practice**-- essentially a fancy term for an activity such as self-quizzing. To ensure that your students are ready to retrieve information when they need it (such as when taking a test or trying to solve meaningful problems), they should practice retrieving that information from memory.

How can you help? Show students why rereading and looking over notes does not work. Then give them frequent low-stakes quizzes. Encourage them to make flashcards. Show them how to effectively use the questions provided in the textbook. Help them form study groups, and encourage them to ask each other questions based on the material they are learning. Invite them to collectively create and then take practice tests. Provide opportunities for them to teach each other key concepts without notes. Teach them to do anything else requiring them to actively recall the information rather than attempt to passively absorb it through rereading.

Think of it this way: if you were trying to help your students develop a skill like playing the piano or improving their free throw in basketball, you probably wouldn't encourage them to spend most of their time reading and rereading information on how to play the piano or improve free-throw shooting. Although reading may be a good way to start learning some of the basics, practice is by far the best way to develop and improve those skills. Likewise, help your students discover that retrieval practice is the key to ensuring that they will be able to recall information when they need it. Rereading portions of a textbook or notes now and then may be necessary, but actively trying to retrieve information from memory will increase the chances that students will be able to remember the material when stakes are high.

Finally, encourage your students to keep trying! If they feel they don't know or understand enough about the material to answer questions about it, invite them to try answering, anyway. Struggling to remember something actually increases the strength of that memory, and it also lets students distinguish what information they understand from that which they still need to learn. As a result, any necessary rereading can be targeted to specific concepts and ideas they haven't yet mastered and thus can be time better spent.

For more information, see--

*Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (2014) by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, & Mark A. McDaniel.

Chapter 5 of *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth about When, Where, and Why It Happens* (2014) by Benedict Carey.

Chapter 6 of *The New Science of Learning: How to Learn in Harmony with Your Brain* (2013) by Terry Doyle & Todd Zakrajsek.

**Submitted by:**

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## Designing for Student Success Using Psychologically Attuned Language

Designing for student success means engaging in **intentional course design**, leveraging tools and pedagogical strategies to support the success of all and especially students who might be challenged to succeed. One way to design for success is to communicate using psychologically attuned language.

### What is communication using psychologically attuned language?

Communication using psychologically attuned language is communication that is humane, thoughtful, kind, empathetic, and growth mindset oriented. It uses language that is easily understandable to students, does not feel punitive, invites conversation, normalizes challenges, highlights support available, and purposefully introduces possibility.

### Why is communication using psychologically attuned language important?

When we reach out to students, it is generally because we want the student to succeed. However, sometimes our well-intended outreach can come across as shaming to students. Then it ends up being unsupportive communication, which further distances the already struggling student. On the other hand, psychologically attuned language leads to communication that is meaningful, values the student as a person, and can often motivate continued learning.

### How to communicate using psychologically attuned language?

While there are many ways to communicate using psychologically attuned language, some of the key characteristics of such communication is to help students, especially struggling students, feel 1) like they belong 2) that there is a path to success moving forward 3) that the instructor genuinely cares about them as a person 4) that their success matters 5) that the instructor as a person and the institution as a whole aims to support their success, and 6) informs the student about existing support systems.

### Annotated example of communication using psychologically attuned language

“Hi <*first name of student*>, [personalize the student]

I was looking at the exam #1 scores for PSIO 431 and saw that *you didn't do as well as expected*. [express high expectations but give honest feedback] Since *it's still early in the semester* [purposefully introduce hope/possibility], *now is the time to try and figure out what went wrong and how we can fix it* [normalize challenge]. I have some quick questions for you that I'm hoping you'll be willing to answer for me.

First and most importantly, do you know why you didn't do well on the exam? Did you read the *notes (as well as the slides) and answer the learning objectives? Did you come to class and participate in the discussions on a regular basis (and even better, what percentage of the time do you think you came and participated?)? Do you have a study group? Lastly, did you come to office hours to discuss the material?* [encourage student to introspect about existence of support systems within the course]

With this information *we can figure out what happened and work together* [show pathway to success] so that the rest of the course goes more smoothly!

Thanks,”

(Source: Cohen, Z. (2017). [Small changes, large rewards: How individualized emails increase classroom performance.](#))

### Some design questions to consider

In what areas of your course do you need to use psychologically attuned language (ex. Course syllabus, course documents)? Are there existing course documents or policies that need to be altered to include psychologically attuned language?

### Resources

Harrison et al. (2019). Investigating instructor talk in novel contexts: Widespread use, unexpected categories, and an emergent sampling strategy. *CBE - Life Sciences Education*, 18(47), 1-23.

### References

Cohen, Z. (2017). [Small changes, large rewards: How individualized emails increase classroom performance.](#)

### **Submitted by:**

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## Authentic Assignments- Applying COVID-19 into your Courses

We don't know how this coming year will play itself out, yet we do know that COVID-19 will continue to impact our teaching, learning and life for some time to come. Consider creating authentic assignments that directly connect your course's learning outcomes to COVID-19. Authentic Assignments provide rich, meaningful and relevant opportunities in any discipline connected to COVID-19.

### Authentic Assignments/Assessments

- Relevant, meaningful, practical assignments that connect “real-life” situations to the course content
- Engaging and interesting learning experiences
- Authentic Assessments directly measure students' performance through “real life tasks” or “situations” that resemble “real life situations” (Wiggins, Grant. (1998). Ensuring authentic performance. Chapter 2 in *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 21 – 42.)
- Often used synonymously with “alternative assessments” or “performance assessments”
- Examples often include demonstrations, debates, field work, simulations, problem solving
- Align with learning outcomes of course

How are Authentic Assignments different then Teachable Moments- teachable moments are unplanned opportunities that arise due to a situation in which the instructors turns the experience into a learning opportunity. Authentic assignments are planned experiences incorporating “real life” situations into the assessments.

### How to create an Authentic Assessment relating to COVID-19

1. Begin by designing your course's learning outcomes as you normally would.
2. Create Authentic Assignments that align your learning outcomes with COVID-19 topics, issues and themes. Be creative. Be interesting. Be relevant.
3. Develop rubrics or marking schemes for your authentic assignment.
4. Introduce and discuss COVID-19 as it relates to your course with your students
5. Provide current resources and references on COVID-19 for your students to use in their assignments.
6. Plan for additional “marking time”. Using the rubric will help make your marking more efficient and effective but will require more time than giving a “traditional test”
- 7.

### Examples of Authentic Assessments relating to COVID-19 by discipline

- Math- have students predict the spread of the virus based on current trends and statistics.
- History- compare previous pandemics to this one.
- Biology- analyze and compare the Coronavirus with influenza or other illnesses
- Chemistry- explore and analyze research being done vaccinations and treatments for COVID-19
- Communication and Journalism- analyze different news coverage of the illness.
- Psychology- have students interview others (virtually) about their stress and coping mechanisms.

- Business- analyze the economic impact of COVID-19
- Nursing- develop strategies to support dying patients and their families when they cannot be together due to COVID-19
- Nursing- analyze the threat to COVID-19 spread when limited PPE and how to address and reduce the threat
- Public Health- analyze CDC updates and predictions
- Social Work- develop strategies and interventions to help reduce domestic abuse due to stress and “stay home orders” during COVID-19
- Engineering- develop plan for transitioning from building automotive parts to building ventilators
- Additional Resource with some great ideas- [Transforming COVID-19 into Learning Activities](#) (developed by Nanda Dimitrov Centre for Educational Excellence \* Simon Fraser University)

**Submitted by:**

Judy Ableser- Director

[Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning \(CETL\)](#)

Oakland University

## Typology of Facilitation Questions

*Asking good questions made me into a scientist* – Isidore Rabi, Nobel Prize Winner, Physics (1944)

This is a brief resource that is useful when you are assigning students to lead class discussions.

You will be facilitating a conversation on the assigned topic of the week. You are free to develop activities, utilize technology, and engage the class in conversation.

Here are some question examples:

Type of Question	Sample Questions
Reactionary/personal perspective	What were your reactions to this week's book reading? What did you learn from reading Cohen & Kisker's chapter 4?
Diagnostic	What do the data results suggest?
Information-seeking	What year was the first Morrill Land Grant legislation passed?
Challenge/ "So what!?"	Why should anyone care about these results? What is a counter-point or counter-perspective?
Call to action	What can we do to better convey the value of a liberal arts education to elected officials?
Priority/rank and sequence	What is the first issue that should be addressed? How would you rank out these issues?
Prediction	If admissions standards are increased, what benefit, if any, would that have on applicant submissions?
Hypothetical scenarios	If the GI Bill did not exist, what impact would this have had on higher education institutions?

*Revised and adapted from Christensen (1991) by Seth Matthew Fishman in 2020.*

### Reference

Christensen, R. (1991). The discussion teacher in action: Questioning, listening, and response. In R. Christensen, D. Garvin, & A. Sweet. (Eds.), *Education for judgment: The art of discussion leadership*. (pp.153-172). Harvard Business School Press.

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## Encouraging Respectful Discussions: Creating Ground Rules

My name is Chris Taylor and I teach graduate writing for the Center for Academic Excellence at Walden University. In an increasingly digital world, it's important to address some ways in which we can create respectful dialogue in the online classroom discussion board. Let's explore some ideas for managing discussion without stifling it by creating netiquette guides and ground rules.

While most online class discussions are respectful, there are times when more specific guidelines are needed to keep everyone on track. The goal is to encourage thoughtful discussion and critical thinking without shutting down discussion. Everyone should feel their contributions are welcome. This is when creating a netiquette handout or set of ground rules regarding conduct can be helpful in making sure everyone in class feels safe to dialogue.

So, how do we do that? We start by providing clear guidelines, so everyone is on the same page. I start by posting a general course netiquette guide that includes suggestions for professional communication. I provide guidance regarding email and discussion including what students can do if a discussion post upsets them, guidelines on using all capital letters (that is, why we shouldn't), and why practicing good grammar shows respect for our readers, which includes classmates and instructors. I also make it clear that rude and/or threatening language will not be tolerated in discussions or emails.

The goal of the netiquette guide is to create a learning environment where everyone feels respected and empowered to share their ideas. Sometimes, I post the guide in my Week 1 Announcements and introduction threads. Other times, I send it to students and ask they acknowledge its receipt. It depends on the class.

Some courses may require more specific guidelines. For instance, if you are teaching a course where social issues are discussed, dialogue can be passionate, but it can also get heated. No one wants to see students feeling they cannot post in the discussion for fear of being bullied or attacked. We can have exciting and thoughtful dialogue that is also professional and respectful. Here is an example of ground rules for discussion I have used in sociology and gender studies courses. These can be adapted for any course. This set is adapted from ground rules in Lynn Weber Canon's article, "Fostering positive race, class, and gender dynamics in the classroom."

### Sample Ground Rules for Discussion\*

1. Acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, speciesism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
2. Acknowledge that one mechanism of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, speciesism, and the like, is that we are all systematically misinformed about groups we are part of and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and non-privileged groups.
3. Agree not to blame others or ourselves for the misinformation we have learned, but to accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
4. Agree not to "blame the victims" for the conditions of their/our lives.
5. Assume that people—both the groups we study and members of this class—always do the best they/we can.

6. Actively pursue information about our own groups and those of others.
7. Share information about our groups with other members of the class, and never demean, devalue, or in any way “put down” people for their experiences. However, do not invade others’ privacy when unwanted.
8. We should be obligated to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit group cooperation and group gain.
9. Create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. If members of the class wish to make a comment that they do not want repeated outside the classroom, they can preface their remarks with a request that the class agree not to repeat the remarks.
10. If you are taking this class, you agree to above ground rules for discussion. If respecting others is something you have a problem with, this may not be the class for you. Respect for diversity is not optional.

\* Adapted from Lynn Weber Cannon's guidelines. To read more about the guidelines, see Cannon, Lynn Weber. 1990. [Fostering positive race, class, and gender dynamics in the classroom](#). *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 18(1-2): 127-34.

<https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=508382835&site=eds-live&scope=site>

I have been using these ground rules for years and have found them incredibly helpful in guiding students and teaching how to have respectful dialogue that also encourages critical thinking. We don't want to shut down discussion, but we do want to make sure all students have an opportunity to share without fear of being attacked. Ground rules are a great way to do that. Ground rules are also an excellent way of letting students know you are reading their posts, that you are paying close attention to the dialogue, and invested in creating an inclusive space. As you use netiquette guides and ground rules, you may find they evolve and grow over time. There may be issues you want to focus on more like using research to support a point of view or asking students to address other students by name. The key is always to facilitate discussion not shut it down.

**Submitted by:**

Chris Taylor  
Core Faculty  
Walden University Center for Academic Excellence

## Evaluating Participation in Online Discussion Boards

Since the COVID-19 pandemic first disrupted in-person classes last spring, universities and instructors have been thinking a lot more deeply about online learning. One widespread and useful tool for classes conducted online is the discussion board. But it can be tricky to evaluate student participation on these boards, especially for instructors who have little experience with them. What follows are some tips about how to assess online discussions.

**Establish expectations and craft a rubric:** Before you begin grading discussion boards, you'll want to be clear, both to yourself and your students, about the purpose of the discussion board. How does the board fulfill your learning goals? What are the ideal learning outcomes for your students? Let these questions guide your evaluation criteria, and make sure those criteria are communicated to students as early as possible. Consider creating a rubric to share with students that clarifies both the quantitative and qualitative expectations for student participation in the discussion board or forum.

**Prioritize quality of engagement:** While your rubric should include quantitative elements and objective measures—like post frequency, post length, and timeliness—make sure to emphasize qualitative ones as well. Discussions might be graded on elements like the demonstration of critical thinking; strength of argument, analysis, or interpretation; use of evidence; and application or synthesis of concepts. Likewise, though considerations like grammar and mechanics are important, the point of these boards is to help students exercise their skills in higher order thinking. Make sure your rubric prioritizes and rewards this kind of substantive student engagement.

**Prioritize interaction and collaboration:** Discussion boards work best when students substantively engage not only with the discussion prompt but also with their fellow classmates. Make sure your rubric evaluates students in part on the frequency and quality of their interactions with others. Productive interaction doesn't always come naturally to students, so consider providing frameworks that help them learn to advance the conversation. For example, you might ask students to respond to each other using a [3CQ](#), in which each student's reply must include a compliment, a comment, a connection (3C) and a question (Q).

**Keep feedback and grading simple:** If you have a large number of students posting to a discussion board every week, it can be difficult to provide frequent individualized feedback. Instead, you might try providing collective feedback for students. Have a class conversation early in the process about participation in the discussion boards: what's working and what could use improvement? To give students some ideas about how to improve their participation, you might also consider allowing them to evaluate their own contributions according to a set of criteria you provide. When it comes to grading, keep your systems as simple as possible: consider credit/no credit grading; roll discussion boards into a holistic participation grade; or use a simple points scale.

Discussion boards can be tricky to evaluate, but they're great tools for developing higher order thinking skills and for building classroom community. With a little thought and planning, you can create a set of evaluation criteria that not only make grading easier but also help your students realize course goals.

### Submitted by:

Emily Donahoe  
University of Notre Dame

## Truly Scaffolding Course Projects to Improve Learning

In his book *Small Teaching*, James Lang discussed how to designing a course using his concept of “Practice” to break down and scaffold major course assessments with smaller formative activities can lead to better course outcomes for students. In my courses, as we revise our curriculum, I am moving toward breaking larger papers down into components for student to submit for feedback ahead of the larger final complete versions.

This goes beyond just submitting a proposal and an outline, which is the only scaffolding that many faculty include in their courses. Instead, I consider the major topics I expect to be covered and make them into optional drafts that students can submit for feedback as we cover similar course topics through the semester. This is in addition to other work that they are completing, not in exchange for it, and is truly optional. For example, in one undergraduate course, their major assessment is an analysis of a leader using the Kouzes and Posner Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders model as well as looking into other components of leadership. Since those other components each have a chapter dedicated in their text, as we cover that chapter, I put on the schedule a draft of that part of the leader analysis in addition to the activities for that lesson. These drafts are generally just a paragraph to a page and quick to “grade.” I can point out where the student is on the right track or not applying concepts correctly, where they forgot a citation or need more support, and give some writing skills notes, too.

This benefits students in multiple ways. They are practicing applying the concepts they are learning about as they learn about them—not just at the end of the semester. They are able to craft a better paper due to the feedback and editing notes, and this often leads to a more richly detailed discussion of the paper’s components. Last, they are less stressed at the end of term when it comes time to put the paper together in its entirety. Instead of having a 6-8 page paper to write in the last weeks of class, they simply pull together all of their drafts and smooth out the transitions between sections. Students note on my course evaluations that they love the way the class is set up and that the drafts are optional, so that weeks when they have more time, they can get ahead, and weeks when they don’t, they know they can put it off. They also like that it’s optional in that they can just do it on their own and not submit if they won’t be on time, with some saying that they did this to allow them to make progress and sought feedback from the campus Writing Center.

Does this add to my grading load? A bit, but consider three things. One, the feedback we’re giving is formative, and we don’t have to wrestle with giving a grade. Two, not all students take advantage of it. The most I’ve ever had is half of a class of 40 submitting *some* of the drafts—very few students submit all of them (and they are generally the students who need the least help!). And three, final grading goes more quickly for the students who did submit drafts (remember, up to half of the class usually does this!) as you’re marking fewer errors, and they’ve had the chance to correct missteps or develop discussions that you won’t have to note on the final copy.

I’ve also been asked, “But doesn’t this skew your grade distribution?” To those folks I ask, “Don’t you mean, ‘Don’t your students score better on the rubric because they are demonstrating that they learned the skills/achieved the outcomes that the assignment targeted?’” I, for one, don’t see that as a problem!

### **Submitted by:**

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## Employing Collaborative Testing

*a way to increase rigor, reduce student anxiety, and provide prompt peer feedback*

Do you struggle to set a fair and balanced exam, or find that students failed to achieve so that you have to curve their grades for a normal distribution in your course? Maybe you employ cooperative learning in the classroom just to test student content knowledge individually? You may wish to consider exploring collaborative testing which can provide students both the opportunity to interrogate what they have learned individually and work collectively on a second chance for extra points.

Students may have not developed the positive academic mindset or sufficient self-belief in their ability to succeed either as a result of negative testing experiences in the past or a lack of critical support (Markman, Balik, Braunstein Bercovitz, & Ehrenfeld, 2010). The negative impacts of this can be further exacerbated if those students put themselves under more pressure to perform well in a course critical to their career progression which can make even one test feel too high-stakes potentially leading to increased anxiety and lower levels of achievement (Hoachlander, 1998).

Collaborative testing; a natural extension of collaborative learning is a high-impact, student centered, active learning approach that has been identified as an avenue for alleviating this anxiety (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008, Leight, Saunders, Calkins, & Withers, 2012). Engaging students collaboratively during testing enables instructors to raise expectations for assessment outcomes whilst giving them the opportunity to work with peer support and feedback. Students perceive that they learn more effectively collaboratively and can feel positively interdependent and accountable to their peer group, leading to additional benefits including higher individual testing scores and development of transferable team-working skills (Leight, Saunders, Calkins, & Withers, 2012).

Collaborative testing has also been shown to increase student understanding of content. Peer-to-peer instruction provides prompt feedback on performance, corrects misconceptions, and maximizes opportunities for critical reflection on learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008). If you routinely have students working collaboratively on assignments designed to help them achieve the learning objectives, extending the use of these established groups into testing seems logical. One common strategy involves testing a new topic area first with a low-stakes test in small groups. This provides retrieval practice and the opportunity to identify gaps in knowledge before those negatively impact their grades. Then having had time to review the material and fill any gaps, they then take a more rigorous medium-stakes test in pairs. Finally, they take their higher-credit-bearing exams individually first, followed by a second opportunity to complete the same test in small groups for additional points. This reduces any need to curve a test that missed the mark on fairly assessing the learning objectives at the level of median student achievement. This method allows students to compensate for incomplete content knowledge earning not receiving extra points whilst learning the material better from prompt peer feedback. This can even be employed for final course assessment making this a fun celebration of learning than an intimidating cumulative final hurdle. Logistically because each student takes a differing amount of time to complete their individual portion of the test, this presents an opportunity for a mindful relaxing break for those that complete quickly. The instructor can encourage students to bring paper to doodle on or color, a novel to read, or even take time to meditate. The collaborative portion enables them to fill gaps in their knowledge, get prompt feedback on their individual performance, and have fun building team-working skills in the process. Even if the

additional credit is less heavily-weighted than the individual portion, the combination of benefits makes it highly worth their while. As an instructor walking around the room while they take the collaborative section, it is rewarding to listen to the students' debates and how they justify what they believe the correct answers are and why, and they tend to be good-natured around challenging tests because if they missed the answer individually they still have the opportunity to get it right with their peers.

Students are also more likely to reflect critically on how they did individually whilst getting prompt feedback on the answers as they go back through the test a second time with their peers. Students often analyze their performance individually following a test so it is preferable to channel that productively. If there is sufficient time in a session, the test could then be gone through by the instructor although this method of testing reduces the need to do this at a later opportunity because instead they get immediate feedback.

Students love this method of testing. Here are just some of the many comments that I have received as an instructor using this method of assessment; *"I loved it"* being the most common on student feedback at the end of the semester. Another student commented

*"I really enjoyed this. Being able to retake and talk about the test right afterwards made me feel a lot better about my own answers and less alone when I was having difficulty at times."*

*"I really enjoyed the collaborative tests a lot. It was great to get feedback from other students and correct mistakes as we went along. It is very helpful and gives you the opportunity to see what you missed, and for other classmates to explain why the answer is right or wrong."*

And finally *"This made me realize that I wasn't alone in the struggle and stress of learning."*

Says it all really!

This teaching tip was crafted by Marina G. Smitherman of Dalton State College who can be contacted at [msmitherman@daltonstate.edu](mailto:msmitherman@daltonstate.edu) for questions. For further explanation and many more creative ways to innovate in your classroom from award-winning faculty across the University System of Georgia, please visit [https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged\\_student\\_learning/volume\\_2](https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged_student_learning/volume_2)

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**Submitted by:**

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## Give Students the Chance to Provide Input on a Grading Rubric

"The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically." --  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

One simple way to engage students in practicing critical thinking about something that they are invested in is to give them the opportunity to provide feedback about how they will be graded on an assignment.

To do this, instructors can choose an assignment and share the instructions with students, along with the grading rubric, and invite feedback about whether the students see any room for improvement on the rubric. This can be a quick 15-minute activity during class, or something that happens asynchronously, for example in a discussion forum or online survey. This can also be done with other elements of class, such as grading class participation.

Giving students the chance to provide this feedback can align with trauma-informed teaching and learning principles such as 1) Physical, Emotional, Social, & Academic Respect, Trustworthiness & Transparency, 2) Collaboration & Mutuality, and 3) Empowerment, Voice, and Choice. It's fair to say that all of our students have experienced some form of trauma due to the pandemic, so trauma-informed teaching and learning principles will be particularly useful going forward.

This tip was adapted from this blog post:

[Sharing power with students by seeking their input on a grading rubric](https://laureliversonhitchcock.org/2019/06/19/sharing-power-with-students-by-seeking-their-input-on-a-grading-rubric/) (Marquart and Verdooner, 2019)  
<https://laureliversonhitchcock.org/2019/06/19/sharing-power-with-students-by-seeking-their-input-on-a-grading-rubric/>

### **Recommended quick read that includes additional resources:**

[Trauma-Informed Online Teaching: Essential for the Coming Academic Year](https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/education--credentials/trauma-informed-online-teaching-essential-coming-academic-year/) (Marquart, Carello, and Báez, 2020)

<https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/education--credentials/trauma-informed-online-teaching-essential-coming-academic-year/>

Wishing everyone well this year!

### **Submitted by:**

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## Faster Grading with ZipGrade

Grading tests and quizzes is sometimes more time-consuming than drafting a syllabus. With traditional grading machines breaking down all too frequently – not to mention the cost of replacement sheets – the entire grading process can grind to a halt, adding unnecessary stress to your already busy schedule.

I recommend downloading **ZipGrade**, an app available for both iOS and Android users that allows instructors to use the camera on their smartphone to scan and grade multiple-choice tests instantly. The app costs \$6.99 per year for unlimited scans, but you can try it for free for up to 100 scans before deciding whether or not to purchase.

The app calculates item analysis, tracks students' performance through their ID number, and saves data for future reference. You can also tag individual items on each quiz. ZipGrade has a lot of useful features, which include:

- Free answer sheets (20, 50 or 100 Question format) are available to download from the [ZipGrade website](#).
- The Custom Answer Sheet Wizard allows you to create the exact answer sheet you need. Options for your custom sheet include:
  - A variety of header boxes (e.g. Name, Quiz, Class, etc.)
  - 1 to 100 questions possible in 4 types
    - Multiple-Choice (up to 10 choices)
    - Multiple-Choice with alternating answer labels
    - Verbose Label
    - Numeric Entry (can indicate number of digits as well as if sign, decimal point, fraction bar, or scientific notation are required)
    - Limit is only how many questions will fit on 1 page.
  - Student ID Section is optional, with 1 to 10 digits selectable
  - Up to 5 answer key versions available
- Given adequate lighting, a stack of 30 multiple-choice only answer sheets can be graded accurately in less than two minutes. The limit is usually based on the user's page-flipping ability.
- ZipGrade will calculate question analysis automatically for each quiz.
- Instructors can print out feedback sheets to return to students.
- In response to the COVID-19 crisis, ZipGrade has also established a web browser option for test taking, allowing for remote assessment.

Using ZipGrade, which is one of many grading apps available via the Google Play Store or Apple App Store, could streamline your grading process and make life easier. Students also appreciate the rapid feedback that the app allows me to provide. Try it out and see if it's the right app for you.

### Submitted by:

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## Student Feedback & Student Self-Assessment

Assessment and evaluation are ever-present terms and practices in higher education. There are various forms of evaluation: instructor-, peer-, and self-assessment and there are a few that can provide almost immediate evaluative feedback. For students to benefit from a course and from their overall education, they must receive appropriate and timely feedback so they are able to self-assess and reflect on their learning

Frequent feedback and guided reflection are important for student learning. Technology provides many in and out of class opportunities for feedback. Quite simply, students who are given real-time feedback and assessment whether from an instructor, a peer, or a self-assessment on the quality of their judgments of their own work, improve their ability to self-assess and assess others.

### Resources

#### [Students and Self-Assessment: Is Accuracy Possible?](https://www.teachingprofessor.com/topics/for-those-who-teach/students-and-self-assessment-is-accuracy-possible/?st=TPemail%3DTP191118%20%3B)

<https://www.teachingprofessor.com/topics/for-those-who-teach/students-and-self-assessment-is-accuracy-possible/?st=TPemail%3DTP191118%20%3B>

#### [How to Give Your Students Better Feedback with Technology: Advice Guide](https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20191108-Advice-Feedback)

<https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20191108-Advice-Feedback>

#### [What we're learning from online education \[TEDGlobal\]](https://www.ted.com/talks/daphne_koller_what_we_re_learning_from_online_education)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/daphne\\_koller\\_what\\_we\\_re\\_learning\\_from\\_online\\_education](https://www.ted.com/talks/daphne_koller_what_we_re_learning_from_online_education)

#### [How to Ungrade \[Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast\]](https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/how-to-ungrade/)

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/how-to-ungrade/>

### Submitted by:

Lisa Irish, EdD  
Director of Faculty Development and Academic Affairs  
MCPHS University

## Podcasts for Teaching

Teaching via podcast, developing your teaching via podcast, and/or the podcast as scholarship are just some of the undeniably available and consumable resource.

### Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast

The [Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast](#) is a free and all-inclusive resource for college and university faculty.

Hosted by Bonni Stachowiak, The Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast airs weekly. The podcast focuses on topics such as excellence in teaching, instructional design, open education, diversity and inclusion, productivity, creativity in teaching, educational technology, and blended learning.

### Six Podcasts to Explore:

- [Gettin' Air with Terry Greene](#) – Terry prepares for each interview with care and asks authentic questions about open education.
- [Teach Better](#) – Doug and Edward bring on superb guests who help to challenge us to be better at teaching.
- [The Black Goat](#) – These psychologists help others in their field to navigate higher education. Even though my discipline isn't in psychology, I learn a lot from every episode.
- [Leading Lines](#) – "...a podcast on educational technology in higher education" from the expert podcasters at Vanderbilt.
- [Tea for Teaching](#) – "a series of informal discussions of innovative and effective practices in teaching and learning. Hosted by John and Rebecca, who run the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the State University of New York at Oswego."
- [EdSurge On Air](#) – "A weekly podcast about the future of education, featuring insightful conversations with educators, tech innovators and scholars, hosted by EdSurge's Jeffrey R. Young and Sydney Johnson."

### MCPHS Faculty Podcasts

- William Zellmer speaks with authors **Mary Amato**, David Bates, and Gordon Schiff about incorporating medication indications into computerized prescriber order-entry systems.
- [Incorporating Medication Indications into the Prescribing Process AJHP Voices](#)
- Recorded on April 4, 2018 (18 min). AJHP is the official journal of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. [www.ajhpvoices.org](http://www.ajhpvoices.org)
- **The PsychSessions:** Conversations about Teaching N' Stuff podcast, co-hosted by Garth Neufeld and Eric Landrum, interview **Stacie Spencer** from MCPHS University in Boston, MA. From multi-year course sequences to innovative assignments, Stacie's students think and reflect deeply about their future.
- [Generationally-Inspired Ardent Advising Advocate](#)
- Recorded March 5, 2019 (1:07:32). [PsychSessions](#) is a podcast, co-hosted by Garth Neufeld and Eric Landrum, is about the teaching of psychology. ([psychsessionspodcast.libsyn.com](http://psychsessionspodcast.libsyn.com))

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