



Creating Engaging Online Instructional Activities

Recommendations and Best Practices

In your face-to-face class, you actively build connections -- connections between you and your students, connections among your students, and connections between your students and the content. Teaching online also offers us many unique ways to design activities that help build connections and community for a rich, engaging learning environment:

- **Situating assignments within real-world contexts** helps students understand the relevance of their learning to contemporary events, research, and their professional goals.
- **Social learning** encourages students to work together and gain inspiration and fresh perspectives.
- Giving students the chance to **apply their knowledge and practice/refine developing skills** helps them see the connections between what they are learning to help the information "stick".
- Providing opportunities for **students to choose from a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning** in each course unit increases student motivation and enhances their learning experience.
- **Breaking down larger assignments into smaller activities/components that have flexible submission deadlines** allows you to provide feedback to students throughout the learning process.

Authentic Contexts

Social Learning

Application & Practice

Student Choice

Flexible Timelines

1. Make Learning Relevant

Develop contexts for learning that connect to current events and students' interests/values.

Be intentional about connecting course content with the world outside the course to help students understand the value of course content to their own lives and goals. Develop assignments that contain contemporary research, connect with practitioners outside the university, and/or issues that students in the course care about.

Online learning happens in physical space.

Build low-tech or no-tech assignments by integrating movement, embodied exercises, and moments of reflection into your courses as assignments.

2. Embrace Social Learning

We are not alone.

Embed opportunities for students to reflect on the role of social interaction or on their interpersonal strengths and areas for growth. Students will be able to learn valuable skills in communication and group dynamics.

Identify direct and indirect learning activities.

While you will naturally take the lead on teaching your students through direct learning activities, you might ask students to take the lead and engage in *indirect* learning. Invite them define and solve problems, build case studies, engage in mind- or concept-mapping, and create "reading for meaning" activities give them a sense of ownership over their learning.

3. Build In Opportunities for Practice and Application

Model the "how" of learning.

Online learning provides tools that break down learning processes for students, helping them understand *how* we read, solve problems, and analyze concepts so they can begin to own their own learning processes.

Offer models for how you read, analyze, and problem-solve; and design assignments that ask students to model their own thinking and approaches. Options include asking students to annotate texts, produce videos in which they walk through their approach to an assignment, or articulate the value of a new resource they have discovered.

4. Offer Students Assignment Options

Have a "plus-one" approach to assignment design.

Offer a variety of modes for students to engage with assignments. For example, in addition to presenting material as text-plus-photos, offer a short video with accompanying transcript or closed captions. In addition to offering text on a screen inside Canvas, offer a downloadable file. In addition to asking learners to provide written responses to assessment questions, offer them a game or a simulation. Finally, offer students the option of completing an assignment in different formats, such as accepting both written and audio responses.

5. Extend or Reimagine Assignment Deadlines

Break down assignments into smaller pieces.

Breaking down complex online assignments into smaller pieces helps students see how the process of learning and their skill development inform the products they create.

Create and maintain feedback loops.

Just like in face-to-face classes, learners interact with you, each other, and course content / activities in diverse ways. Online learnings make recording and tracking feedback easy; use that information to help you tailor your interactions with students.