

Ten Online Teaching Tips You May Not Have Heard

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At a time when online institutions are in fierce competition for students and accreditation agencies are taking a critical look at online course quality, it is becoming increasingly important for online instructors to ensure that they are exceeding their institution's expectations.

Students are also expecting more from their online courses. And while most of us know the importance of addressing students by name in the discussion board and offering students substantive feedback on assignments, there many more things we can do.

In this article, I outline 10 online teaching tips that may be less well-known but can lead to a more positive experience for both professor and student.

1. Communicate Information Using Multiple Channels – If you have important information to convey to students, don't use just one channel of communication, use multiple. For example, instead of simply posting information only in the announcements area, or only in the feedback area, or sending it only via email, include the information in all three of these places. This will reduce the number of students saying they did not get the memo. Posting information in as many places as possible will result in more students getting the information they need to succeed.

2. Sync School Email Account to Phone – Contact your institution's help desk for instructions on how to sync your school email account to your iPhone or Android. Not only will receiving email in multiple places reduce your likelihood of missing messages, it will also allow you to address urgent questions and concerns in a timely fashion. Students are often pleasantly surprised at my response time. However, it is important to set boundaries by letting students know when to expect a reply. For example, you can inform them that you normally respond within a 24-hour period, during regular business hours. This will help maintain your work-life balance.

3. Text – If you can't reach a student via phone or email, try texting! It's harder to miss or ignore a text message. Also, students will appreciate the fact that they can text you if they have a quick question. My students have thanked me numerous times for being accessible in this way. This tip comes with a caveat: While students will benefit from being able to text, it is also important to let them know upfront (via the syllabus or another memo) that it can take up to 24 hours for you to reply.

4. Create an Instagram account – Utilize social media to motivate and share information with students. Create an Instagram page just for students to include motivational quotes, memes, reminders, tips, etc. You might even include a photo or two of yourself, your kids, or pets! Most students enjoy getting to know their professor as a person.

5. Keep a Running List of Resources to Include in Feedback – Compile a list of helpful resources to send to students who are struggling in certain areas. For example, if a student submits a paper that illustrates he or she does not know how to use commas, don't just point out the mistake, but refer to your list of resources and include the appropriate resource in your feedback. A Word document, bookmarks folder, or desktop sticky note are great places to keep these resources handy.

6. Use Reflection Questions – Get students thinking more critically about their writing assignments by asking questions, such as:

In what ways, if any, did writing this paper change your views about the topic?

What did you find most challenging about writing about this topic?

What do you still want to know about this topic?

What did you enjoy most about writing this paper?

What did you discover about this topic that surprised you?

7. Create a Forum – If your Learning Management System allows, create a forum where students can go to find useful information and ask questions on a subject. For example, if you notice that most of your students struggle with APA, create a forum where they can easily locate resources on the subject and ask related questions.

8. Do a Welcome Call/Email – If you have time, call each student at the start of the term to say hello and find out what they hope to get out of the class. Most students will appreciate the time you take to do this. If time doesn't allow, send a private email, addressing each student by name, and asking a direct question to start a brief dialogue.

9. Promote the Rubric – Remind students of the grading rubric for the week's main assignment in announcements and email to make sure they know what they will be graded on to eliminate questions like "How long does the paper have to be?"

10. Reflect on Your Teaching – On a weekly or bi-weekly basis, ask yourself:

What can be improved about my individual interactions with students?

What more can I do to make this subject more engaging and memorable?

What is lacking in my classroom?

Dr. Noura Badawi has been teaching online for more than 12 years.

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