

Teaching Online: Best Practices

This guide has been designed to help all EUI staff who may now transition to teaching fully online. It is mainly targeted at staff who have never used Brightspace, EUI's Virtual Learning Environment platform, before, but can also be helpful to staff who are already using Brightspace for some of their teaching as well as for staff who are already teaching fully online.

What is Brightspace

Brightspace is a virtual learning environment, VLE. A VLE an online platform that can be used to provide students with readings, lecture notes and/or recordings, PowerPoint presentations and other types of content. It can also be used to set up activities and assessments for students. Activities and assessments include discussion boards, quizzes with different types of questions (Multiple Choice, True/False, Short Answer, Written Answer, etc.) and assignments where students can submit documents, etc.

Activities in a VLE can either be synchronous or asynchronous.

Course Preparation

When teaching online, do not expect to deliver classes in the same linear fashion as face-to-face teaching. Online classes are often most productive when they serve to consolidate and develop work prepared in advance of a class. The following guide lists the steps you need to take at each stage for the successful delivery of your course.

Getting started

What to do	How to do it
1. Create a clearly defined syllabus.	The syllabus should be clear and informative. It should include: course description; course schedule; contact methods; course objectives; learning outcomes; ;
2. Detail any syllabus information.	Include items that address/explain the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Netiquette• Copyright information & Plagiarism• The University withdrawal policy (if appropriate)• Technical requirements for the course & support• Downloads/plugin-ins

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help for students with disabilities • Late work policies • Orientation aids; • Grading scales and rubrics • Attendance requirements; • Exams & grading policies; • Course schedule; • Communication practices
2. Create a FAQ of technical and other requirements.	Ask students to build up the FAQ section together by posting any queries that are not included in the FAQ section (you can create a new section in the discussion forum called FAQ)
3. Greet the students with a welcome message, and tell them how to get started in the course.	The welcome message is the first thing students see when they initially log into the course. The tone therefore should be warm and informative e.g. who you are, info on passwords, anything else you want them to know.
4. Detail contact information and preferred modes of contact.	Inform students on your availability online and offline and response time.
5. Introduce yourself to the class, and have students introduce themselves to you and to one another.	You can ask students to post entries in the discussion forum and answer questions, such as the city they live in, why they enrolled in the course, what they already know about the content of the course, and what they hope to learn. In that way you can build a collaborative environment and allows you to know what they already know and built on that.
6. Ensure that students understand what is required for them to succeed in an online course.	<p>Include an activity/tutorial that teaches students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful study strategies (see OER study skills) • How to communicate & behave online
7. State attendance requirements.	Clearly define participation requirements and any grading associated with them. To avoid confusion, create the 1 st entry in the discussion and follow up participation.
8. Establish communication rules.	<p><u>Student-Tutor Interaction</u></p> <p>Decide and make known to students how often you will check and reply to emails e.g. answer any e-mail inquiry within 12 hours of receiving it, seven days a week. There are times</p>

	though, such as the beginning or end of a course and the few days before assignments are due, that more attention is needed.
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Course Organization and Design

What to do	How to do it
1. Structure the course in a well-organized manner, give meaningful headings and sub-headings and make it easy to navigate.	The content should be divided into learning units such as weeks, themes/topics, appropriately labelled, and presented in a logical manner. Keep key information at the top of the page, and give folders, link and documents meaningful headings.
2. Ensure that links are active and up-to-date and web pages are consistent.	Check all links are current and avoid meaningless information and items
3. Ensure that all students are aware of submission dates and any requirements.	Submission deadlines should be explicitly stated in the course syllabus. In addition, send reminders/announcements in advance to inform students.
4. Design the course so that all aspects of it are accessible to all students including those disabilities.	Follow the accessibility rules e.g. When using audio files, include a transcript of the recording for users with hearing disabilities; Provide ALT text for images; Use meaningful text for links; Provide sufficient contrast between text and background colours and do not convey meaning by colour alone; When using video files with audio, synchronized transcripts (captions) should be included for learners who have hearing disabilities. Tables should be used only to present data, not for layout of a page. Make sure that the content included makes sense when read from left to right, top to bottom.
5. Include an area where students can ask and answer class-related questions and one where they can ask and	Label the areas clearly so the students don't get confused e.g. "Student-to-Student questions" and "Virtual Café/Student Lounge".

answer non-class-related questions.	
6. Design the course so that pages can be downloaded within a reasonable period of time even without a high-speed Internet connection.	<p>Do not upload extremely large files to your course. Image file size should be under 50k. The JPEG format should be used for photos; GIF should be used for all other graphics. Audio and video can be streamed, instead of downloaded. Design for users with a 56k modem.</p> <p>To create manageable video files: Limit the size of your video segments or break it into smaller chunks; Limit the width and height; Compress the video as much as possible; Consider streaming the video portions if Internet access is available.</p>

Course Development

What to do	How to do it
1. Introduce learning units with an overview of the topic.	This can simply be a paragraph that briefly explains the topic to be studied.
2. Clearly define learning outcomes for each learning unit.	<p>The outcomes should derive from your course's learning aims and detail the specific tasks that students will be able to complete. Your learning outcomes need to be active, clear and specific. They should focus on making learning visible. Make sure they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are written in the future tense; • identify what you want learners to achieve; • are achievable and assessable use • easy-to-understand language and ideas
3. Clearly write your content and lessons.	The clearer you write, the less confusion for your students. Include formatting techniques such as bolds, bullets, and white space, and make sure your text contains no spelling or grammar errors.
5. Align your assessments to your outcomes.	Use your outcomes to determine your assessments. For example, if one of your outcomes states that students will evaluate a topic, make sure the assessment has a corresponding essay question that asks students to evaluate.

6. Apply peer-review (student-to-student)	Ask your students to peer-review each other work and comment. In that way, they learn how to improve their work by constructive criticism and reflection.
7. Set deadlines assignments and ensure students are aware	Set the “Available from” date and “Due date” for your assignment and decide whether to prevent late submissions. Make sure that students are informed about it.
8. Show students samples of assignments/essays.	Sample assignments/essays are examples that your students can view in order to better understand the differences between quality and non-quality work.
9. Show criteria for grading.	Let students know the criteria they will be graded against.
10. Provide readable size material.	Lecture materials should be divided into short, chunked sections with links to subsequent pages, if necessary. Audio/video/ppts should be chunked in 5-10 minutes in duration.
11. Ensure that the content meets the needs of students with different learning styles.	Audio narrations, podcasts, videos, pictures, charts and graphs, and simulations all enhance learning.
12. Enhance the students’ learning with additional resources.	Provide additional resources for both students who want to learn more, or they struggle with a topic.
13. When designing lengthy quizzes or exams, design them so students see one question at a time. For formative assessments, avoid time restrictions.	This way, each answer gets saved once the student goes to the next question, which is helpful in case the student's browser times out. If you decide that you really want all of the questions presented on the same screen, consider dividing the lengthy exam in multiple shorter exams, and tell students to save answers after each question.
14. Liaise with the library.	The library can assist you with the integration of reading lists in Brightspace, guides and resources for your students.

Course Delivery

What to do	How to do it
1. Engage with student discussions.	Choose discussions that are interesting and provide feedback, comment without over-participating though. You just need to motivate them or direct them to think critically.
2. Be supportive and present.	Your students need to know that there is a pattern and they can talk to you if they need to. A simple but useful technique to encourage a sense of 'presence' is learning to speak to the camera rather than to the faces on the screen. This means that you are addressing individuals using 'eye contact' rather than looking at them obliquely. It may be good idea to create consider setting up Peer Tutor relationships so that students can support each other, particularly with technology.
3. Give prompt feedback.	Delivering feedback on time will students understand their weaknesses and strengths. The feedback needs to be specific and informative.
4. Try to pair students with each other.	Peer and collaborative learning have been proved to be very effective educational practices. Such practices, allow you take the burden from you as well.
5. Monitor students' engagement in Brightspace.	Use the Brightspace tools to check if and how often students are log in and motivate them accordingly.
5. Review and evaluate your course	Gathering feedback is not done as an official evaluation of the course; it is merely a way to improve the course. Surveys can be used to gather the feedback, and they can be used at any point during, and/or toward the end of, the course.

Resources

Online learning

- **Learning to Teach Online MOOC** UNSW's long-established that has already had tens of thousands of international enrollees - Introduced here <https://ltto.unsw.edu.au/ltto-mooc/> and the Coursera MOOC itself is here <https://www.coursera.org/learn/teach-online>
- [How to move teaching online fast](#): A short guide by the University of London
- [Moving to Online teaching in response to the coronavirus, Covid 19](#): A free resource by Epigeum
- [Delivering the curriculum online](#): Tips on online curriculum and use of Microsoft Teams created by Rose Bruford College
- [Curriculum design and support for online learning](#): JISC guide

Assessment & Feedback

[UCL Teaching toolkits](#) by UCL

[Assessment and Feedback](#): by Higher Education Academy

[LSE Assessment Toolkit](#): a very comprehensive toolkit by LSE featuring all types of assessment feedback techniques.

Brightspace

- Brightspace EUI guide