

Teaching Distance Students Online

1. Be there.

Distance students often feel isolated. Use the available communication tools such as announcements, welcome messages, discussion board postings and forums to communicate to the student that you care about their questions and concerns. Challenge, mentor, interact with and engage your distance student to help reduce the sense of isolation which accompanies distance learning.

2. Clearly convey expectations for students and yourself.

Explain how you expect your students to communicate online and how they should communicate with you. Let the students know when, where and how often you will respond to their questions and concerns.

3. Respond quickly and expect quick responses in return.

Give your students due dates for assessment submission along with the due dates for assessment return, whether online or via the postal service. Good feedback is frequent and timely. If you are finding this difficult, perhaps a different approach to assessment or feedback is required. Be sure to give some feedback straight away. One approach is to post online a page or two of generic comments about common problems with the assignments they are submitting. An FAQ on assessment is one approach you might consider.

4. Establish a tone of excellence.

Model pieces of work and behaviours that are exemplary. One approach is to provide students with online examples from previous offerings that were excellent or, more simply, point out discussion forum posts or replies that exemplify excellent insights.

5. Feedback and feed-forward.

Feedback is a key aspect of how you can enable your students to improve. Help the distance student value and use your feedback by spending time and energy explaining the importance of feedback. Link the feedback directly to the learning outcomes so the student can interpret the context of the feedback and encourage the students to give you feedback. Feed-forward by demonstrating how their feedback is highly valued in course improvement.

6. Consider assessment as learning.

Give your students more detailed feedback more often. How does student who has received only a mark improve? Remember that failing is not a single event but a series of hesitations and more frequent feedback on their efforts will drive their improvement. Formative assessment methods such as quizzes or Q&A forums can facilitate this, especially with your distance students.

7. Open and wrap.

Introduce each week's learning outcomes and activities at the start and wrap-up the previous week's activities. Clear structure helps reduce confusion, improves their time-management and sense of isolation.

8. Drive the technology.

Don't let the technology drive you. Keep it simple and use only as much technology as is required to achieve your purpose. Use the following online chart to help align your educational purposes with the tools available in Moodle. <http://tinyurl.com/eToolGuide>

9. You are not alone.

Peer evaluation of your teaching can be a great way for testing new ideas and teaching approaches. So don't be afraid to 'phone a friend'. The Educational Development Unit and Library staff are there to help you with your teaching and course.

10. Be efficient and effective, not busy and overloaded.

Use appropriate existing resources when you can and make use of online resources such as online journal articles where you can. Using existing online resources that are copyright compliant, can save time and effort by reducing the need to develop similar resources.