

# Online Teaching Best Practices Checklist

## Before class begins

### Welcome Letter [about two weeks before class begins]

- **What is it?** An email or document attachment sent to students a few weeks before the class begins.
- **Why should I do it?** To welcome students to the course, reinforce that it is an online course, direct them to information about what technology they will need, and provide them with course information such as the textbook to purchase and how to access Canvas tutorials.
- **How do I do it?** Start with the Welcome Letter template in the “Build” section of Resources on the Online Teaching website for ideas on what to include, then tailor this information to your own course.

### Open your course, not your modules [about one week before class begins]

- **What is it?** Open your non-content items in your course early, such as your Homepage, Start Here Module, your instructor introduction, your syllabus and schedule, your course overview/orientation screencast, etc.
- **Why should I do it?** So that students have a chance to become familiar with the layout and structure of the course, watch your introduction, read the syllabus, etc., and then are able to dive in to learning on the first day of the course.
- **How do I do it?** Set your learning modules to be released on the first day of the course, but ensure the rest of your course is accessible to students. Let them know, via the Welcome Letter, when the course will open and that they are encouraged to log in early and explore course resources.

## The First Week

### Welcome Announcement [Day One]

- **What is it?** An announcement welcoming students to the course.
- **Why should I do it?** To set the tone and expectations for the course and, additionally, remind students that their online course has begun.
- **How do I do it?** Craft a concise announcement that gives students a good idea of what they can expect from the course, including total number of hours per week they’ll spend in the course, interaction requirements, how to reach out with questions, etc. Consider ways to create a positive, motivating, welcoming tone that lets students know that they can succeed in the course.

### TechHelp/technology announcement

- **What is it?** An announcement that reminds students where to go for technology help and reiterates helpful technology information that is relevant to your course.

- **Why should I do it?** To reinforce for students that you are not the TechHelp desk, but they have 24/7 support available, and to proactively provide other resources that may be helpful.
- **How do I do it?** Remind students that there's a direct link to Help in the left-hand navigation of Canvas and other helpful links on the course homepage. In the announcement, include the web link to TechHelp as well as the phone number.

#### **Email students who have not logged in [Day Three]**

- **What is it?** A direct email to individual students who have not accessed the course in the first few days.
- **Why should I do it?** To see if they are having problems logging in and need help, to reinforce that they must log in to the course several times a week, and to establish a connection with students who may be struggling.
- **How do I do it?** Using the Inbox within Canvas or Flashline email, send a message out to all students who have not yet logged in to the course. Ask them if they are having issues logging in, or if there is anything you can do to help. Ask them to either log in to the course or respond to you by a given date.

#### **Beginning Weeks**

##### **First Assignment Reminder announcement (continue reminders throughout course)**

- **What is it?** An announcement reminding students of the due date and time of their first assignment. You might also attach the course schedule of assignments and due dates or remind students where it is in the course.
- **Why should I do it?** To provide the same reminders we do in face-to-face classes, to help students develop a schedule, and to prevent procrastination.
- **How do I do it?** Post an announcement with the assignment in the subject line and let students know when it is due. Remind them where the assignment information/prompt/rubric is, and what tool they will be using. You might also let them know when they can expect feedback, and post an additional announcement when they have grades and feedback to view.

##### **Office Hours announcement**

- **What is it?** An announcement reminding students when you are available for live office hours and how they can contact you. You can also consider holding topic-specific office hours, such as for a big assignment or complex topic, where students can email questions ahead of time.
- **Why should I do it?** To remind students that you are available to answer questions or provide more information at any time.
- **How do I do it?** Post an announcement with your stated "live" office hours and let students know how they can contact you (instant answer via email, Canvas Inbox, office phone, Teams, etc.). For special sessions, take questions ahead of time (and create some of your own to address), and hold and record the session in Microsoft Teams. Then, post the session in your course.

## Throughout the Course

### "Just in Time" online teaching

- **What is it?** A webcam video, audio recording, or text-based post that provides more information on concepts that students (through their questions or work) seem to be confused about. You can create "Clarification Point" videos to clarify topics, post additional resources, or address misconceptions/ answer questions within the module, or respond to questions in an open Q&A discussion forum.
- **Why should I do it?** To provide students with additional information or explication for difficult or complex course topics or problems.
- **How do I do it?** Create a webcam video or screencast with Kaltura or another technology, or create an audio file or text post. Post as an announcement, or add an item within the relevant module and let students know, via an announcement, that you've added information.

### Summary announcements

- **What is it?** Summary announcements can be used to summarize the big ideas from a module that is ending, or to provide summary feedback to the whole class that highlights good ideas contributed, etc. They can also be used to connect the topics together that students are learning in the course or connect the topics to real-world scenarios.
- **Why should I do it?** To help students focus on the big takeaways from a module or discussion, highlight the major points for a reading, and/or provide closure and connection from one learning unit to the next. Summary feedback can also highlight for students what an exemplary assignment includes, and give greater insight into your expectations.
- **How do I do it?** Post an announcement indicating you're providing either a summary/takeaway of a module or providing summary/overall feedback on an assignment. For the former, also consider connecting the past module to what students will be learning next. For the latter, consider posting a webcam video, screencast, or audio file, so that students can gain encouragement and insight from the tone of your voice.

### Instructor Blog

- **What is it?** A blog that you keep throughout the course as a way to connect with students and expand the relevance of course content and activities.
- **Why should I do it?** To share timely information with students, provide insights, connect students to professional resources, make what they're learning/doing in class even more relevant, and increase your teaching presence.
- **How do I do it?** Create a discussion board in Canvas to use as your "blog" and have some planned posts to make. You can link to a relevant news article or scholarly article, expand on an idea that was in a student assignment or discussion board, or post when you're at conferences to highlight a session. Encourage students to reply/comment on your blog posts, and make an announcement when a new blog post is up.

### Timely and Quality Feedback

- **What is it?** Feedback on activities and assessments provided in a suitable time frame from when students complete the assignment.
- **Why should I do it?** To guide students' learning, and to provide them with feedback in time for them to use that guidance on their next assignment.
- **How do I do it?** For auto-graded quizzes and tests, consider including feedback for both correct and incorrect answers. For other assignments, provide feedback in the *Speedgrader* in Canvas, use the built-in annotation features to highlight and add comments, download an MS Word doc and use track changes, and/or create audio, webcam video, or screencast feedback. Also, make an announcement to let students know they have feedback and let them know *how* to access feedback for the first one or two assignments, ideally by including a screenshot of the student view.

### Final Week

#### Provide Closure via an Announcement or Course Item

- **What is it?** A way to bring the course "full circle" with summary thoughts on big takeaways, notes for outstanding items, reminders to complete any feedback surveys, and closing thoughts from you.
- **Why should I do it?** To provide students with a sense of closure for the course.
- **How do I do it?** Create a webcam or screencast with Kaltura or another technology, or create an audio file or text post. Post as an announcement, or add an item on the home page or in the last module, and let students know via an announcement that you've added an important post.