

# 10 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES TO BECOME A BETTER ONLINE INSTRUCTOR

We often fail to make the connection between what we do in a physical classroom and what we do online. This guide aims to make that connection explicit – to help you think about what you do well in person so that you can do those things in your online classes, too. If you already employ some of these practices, the intent here is to help you think more comprehensively about what else you can do to be an excellent online instructor.



## SHOW UP TO CLASS

*Post a weekly announcement to provide an overview of the coming week's topic or a recap of the previous week's work, or both.*

*Respond to questions posted in an online question-and-answer discussion forum or sent to you by email.*

*Grade and return students' work in a timely fashion.*

*Hold online office hours according to a schedule, by appointment, or both.*



## BE YOURSELF

*Infuse your writing with warmth. Convey your support.*

*Be human. Sometimes the inherent distance between professor and student in an online class infects your written communication.*

*Students appreciate seeing your face and hearing your voice. Don't worry about making sure every stray hair is in place. If you trip over your tongue while recording, that's OK.*



## PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

*Get outside your own head – where your online class makes sense and everything is clear. Instead, try to envision how your students are experiencing the class.*

*Are your instructions clear on how long students' discussion posts should be, and on how they should cite sources? Do you include a detailed grading rubric? Do you provide an example of a successful final project, so that students can see your expectations and don't have to muddle through while they wait for a reply from you?*



## ORGANIZE COURSE CONTENT INTUITIVELY

*Activate the demo-student-preview function and navigate your course as if you were new to online learning.*

*Is it clear where things are found? Note times when it's not immediately evident what a student should do.*

*Remember, online students can't generally ask a quick question in real time. Remove any opacity brought on by the design by giving quick pointers wherever you can.*

*Think about how the use of menus, modules, folders, and other organizing structures helps or hinders students' progress through the course.*



### ADD VISUAL APPEAL

*When thinking about the visuals of an online class, look to your favorite websites. Study the layouts of books and magazines that you enjoy.*

*An online course that is visually appealing (or at least not completely ugly) helps students to engage more frequently and more meaningfully.*

*All visuals should be accessible to all students.*

*Not sure where to start? Contact [MyCourses4faculty@spcollege.edu](mailto:MyCourses4faculty@spcollege.edu) for help.*



### EXPLAIN YOUR EXPECTATIONS

*Write down the directions as if you were having a conversation with a student, so they don't read like a textbook.*

*Create an informal two-minute explainer video to flesh out some details of an assignment.*

*Provide a rubric.*

*Share an example of student work that earned top marks. Maybe even share an example of mediocre work so students can compare the two.*



### SCAFFOLD LEARNING ACTIVITIES

*Look for ways to break down complex tasks so that students make timely progress and receive feedback while there is still time to adjust their approach.*

*Scrutinize your assessments, both large and small. Have your students had the opportunity to build – step by step, as they would in an in-person classroom – the knowledge and skills they will need do well on those assessments?*



### PROVIDE EXAMPLES

*Source existing videos that put another spin on a particular topic.*

*Record a short guest-lecture video to let students hear from another expert in your field.*

*Structure ways for students to explain new information to one another – as novice learners, they may come up with examples and illustrations that make more sense to their peers than your explanations do.*



### MAKE CLASS AN INVITING, PLEASANT PLACE TO BE

*Use plenty of visuals, media, interactive tools, and learning activities.*

*Convey positivity and optimism that students can succeed.*

*Respect their time and engagement by being present and engaged yourself.*

*Demonstrate compassion and caring for your busy online learners.*



### COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

*Participate in workshops offered by your institution's Online Learning and Services and CETL.*

*Join book-discussion groups with your colleagues to delve into books about effective online-teaching strategies.*

*Subscribe to teaching-related newsletters*

*Demonstrate your commitment to student success by pursuing your own professional development from time to time.*

**For Additional Information and Support,  
Contact us at: [mycourses4faculty@spcollege.edu](mailto:mycourses4faculty@spcollege.edu)  
727-341-3500**

