

## **Top 10 Tips for Moving a Class Online**

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Please note that these tips come from 20+ years of teaching online courses. They also come from experiencing rapid change. In 2009, the city of Valley City faced a record flood, breeches in the dikes, the sewer collapsing, and a mandatory evacuation of the city. Students had gone home for their Easter break and were not allowed back. Many were without their books or laptops. Not everyone had a smartphone in 2009. These are what I consider to be my advice for those of you who are experiencing the rapid change of putting your f2f class online.

1. **Online is not face-to-face.** Therefore, you cannot move a face-to-face class online. That being said, you can create an online course for your face-to-face class. Once you give up trying to make the online class like your face-to-face course, you will rid yourself of much frustration.
2. **Keep in contact with students.** Make sure students know how to contact you. That should include at a minimum your e-mail on the syllabus and each week in your announcements. You may also want to include your Skype or Facebook information, or cellphone number if you are comfortable giving that out. If a student “disappears” from class e-mail him/her/they. Let that student know that you are available for them. Also consider video conferencing for office hours. This could be Skype or Zoom or Webx. Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is a wonderful tool and very intuitive. Students need to know you are there. Remember, they signed up for a f2f course.
3. **Focus on what’s important in your class.** Look at your syllabus. What do you need to cover? Yes, I know, all of it. But your students are under stress, and so are you. Is there anything you have planned that can be eliminated? What objectives or competencies have you not met? How can you do so in the few weeks to come?
4. **Focus on consistency.** Students need something consistent in their lives right now. Think of it this way: Going to a new grocery store is a little frustrating as you are figuring out the layout. But just as you have it down, the next time you go, they change it all around! The bread is where the produce belongs, the cereal is now where the baking supplies were, and you’ve been up and down each aisle several times looking for the mustard.
  - a. **Have consistent course containers.** I use weekly folders, for example. In each folder I have two additional folders. One is called “Lessons and Links” and the other is called “Assignments.” It’s pretty intuitive what students will find in each.
  - b. **Have consistent deadlines.** Don’t make students try to remember or guess. This gets them into a routine, too. I use Thursdays for discussion and reading checks and Sundays for larger assignments and responding to classmates.
  - c. **Have consistent office hours and check ins.** When you are f2f, the class isn’t held every day of the week. You do not need to be available 24/7 for online courses. Let the students know when you will be checking in (e.g. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays). Hold consistent office hours.
  - d. **Open the class at the same time each week.** Students will then know when they can look for the material.
5. **Include video.** Social Presence is important, so incorporating video is important in your lessons. That being said, resist being the Talking Head that lectures for 30 minutes or more. Talking heads are boring. Instead, consider videotaping in chunks—one concept, one video. Or just make an intro video. Remember, though, to close caption. Yuja has captioning in it, but YouTube, does too.

6. **Include interaction.** This can be the discussion board, Voice Thread, closed Facebook or Twitter discussions, Google Hangouts, Slack, Flipgrid, or other place. Make sure the discussion questions are truly discussion, rather than questions that have right or wrong answers. Questions that provide reflection provide students the opportunity to talk about their experience with a subject.
7. **Consider using OER.** Students may or may not have their books. Yet there are wonderful sources available with open access texts and materials. Check them out. Here are three links:
  - [University of Minnesota](#)
  - [Valley College \(specific to Communication\)](#)
  - [Open Textbook Resources](#)
8. **Remember, less is more.** How much work should you be expecting of your students each week? Try this course calculator from Rice University. <https://cte.rice.edu/workload> Additionally consider how much time you have or will need to prep and grade. Consider a chapter or two or three articles of reading, and supplement with videos, such as Ted Talks, YouTube or Vimeo videos, Films on Demand, Kanopy...(the last two are streaming services your library probably has). Or have them find video clips that demonstrate the concept.
9. **Abide by the rule of three.** Place information about what students are doing and what is due in THREE places in your course. Think about it—we revolve around that number 3. New/weather/sports, breakfast/dinner or lunch/supper, the primary colors, three strikes and you're out, the trinity, blood/sweat/tears, three feet to a yard, three-legged races, three blind mice, the Sanderson sisters.... I use these three places:
  - a. The syllabus—I have the course schedule at the end of it. You could also use the LMS calendar or a separate menu item that is just the agenda.
  - b. The folder for the week—I put it on the outside of the folder.
  - c. Announcements—I write a paragraph or two introducing the week, highlighting important information, etc. and always include what is due. I usually have two components to this: *What to do?* Where I list what they should do and *What's due?* Where I give deadlines. I also e-mail them the announcement (so I guess that's 4??)
10. **Include a Conversation place.** I suggest three places (there's that number three again!)
  - a. A Q/A forum, where students can go to ask questions about the course. Other students may be able to answer the questions. Additionally let students know how often you will check in and make sure to respond when you do, even if it is to confirm a fellow student's answer.
  - b. An FAQ where you can put questions you are getting from students through e-mail or other forms of communication into one place and then answer them.
  - c. A Cybercafe, where students can talk about things not related to class, such as where they are located now, how they are doing, celebrations such as a new baby or engagement,

And a bonus tip:

11. **Remember Grace.** Grace for yourself if you forget something, something doesn't work, or you fall behind, and grace for your students if they are having difficulty navigating the online course. They didn't sign up for this; they may not be online learners. Additionally, they may not have the devices or wi-fi like they have when they are on campus. The important goal is that they are learning the material, right?