*Principles of Best Practice in Online Education
Centre for Continuing Education, University of Regina

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Principle 1: Encourage student-instructor contact and interaction

Frequent student-instructor contact is an important factor in student motivation, intellectual commitment and personal development.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Offer an alternative form of contact – phone, email, fax, chat, face-to-face. Clearly inform students of your expected email and voicemail response time (e.g. within 24 hrs etc.)
- Outline the protocol for email, voicemail, forums or other modes of communication
- Establish virtual office hours when you are available for online chats, phone calls, or email
- If using email outside of the Course Management System (CMS), acknowledge initial receipt of students' email with an automatic email reply
- Regularly send general messages to the whole class using course email or an announcements forum
- Provide information for students before the start of the semester – let them know where to find the class, when the class starts/ends, exam dates, details about course materials, synchronous expectations, technical requirements and third party disclaimers re software, images, etc., and let them know what to expect during first week
- If possible, hold an orientation session at the beginning of the semester face-to-face and/or using a web conference provider (e.g. Adobe Connect) or record a video introduction
- Get to know your students as individuals and let them know who you are as an individual. Introductory forums help in this regard.
- Refer to students by name

- Limit class size to allow more instructor interaction per student. (Increases in class size should be accompanied by the addition of TAs or other moderators.)
- Follow-up on students who are not participating. Do this especially during the first weeks of class before drop-class deadlines arrives
- Provide frequent and copious feedback. Offer frequent short assignments/quizzes or an engaging discussion forum that allows frequent feedback and interaction
- Establish replies and responses as important values of online discussions, through tone, modeling, and grade weighting. Use exemplars and rubrics to show expectations of students' responses
- Encourage student questions, input, and feedback; clearly state that all points of view are welcome and respected. Consider an "ask your Instructor" forum which would bring questions to the attention of all students in the class
- Become involved in class discussions

Principle 2: Encourage student cooperation

Cooperative learning that is characterized by interaction, personal responsibility, collaborative skills, and group processing enhances learning.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Design activities such as group discussions that promote cooperation
- Use techniques for fostering student cooperation: peer reviews, chats, discussion forums, group projects (e.g. example 'group agreement'), study groups, team learning and peer support
- Encourage links between students: 1) exchange of student phone numbers and emails, 2) interview and introduce one another
- Establish sound pedagogical reasons for using group work
- Consider prerequisite skills and support students to produce quality group work. Provide resources on quality student interactions such as this document:

Principle 3: Encourage active learning

To maximize learning, students must interact with the material they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and incorporate what they are learning into the their world view.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Ask students to state what they expect to learn in the class
- Ask students to provide and critique URLs that enhance learning
- Pose discussion questions that foster critical thinking and problem solving
- Engage library support mechanisms with research projects
- Use open-ended question to encourage extended and wide-ranging dialog

- Use quizzes/questions and Q & A forums that require students to review the content (self-check or automatically graded online)
- Ask students to teach their classmates or, in groups, have a student leader summarize group discussions
- Ask students to develop/create: learning products, knowledge artifacts, concept maps
- Encourage opinions supported by evidence and, if possible, have students assume a perspective other than their own to gain a fuller understanding
- Follow-up reading assignments with discussions, simulations, or applications to case studies/scenarios
- Select real-world, relevant, and practical assignments that allow students to apply and practice the concepts learned to their own real; life experience SW
- Ask students to critique other students' work with careful setting down of expectations
- Ask student to reflect on their learning

Principle 4: Give prompt feedback

The instructor's role is critical as it gives the students help in assessing their knowledge and competence.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Respond with frequent email: with answers to questions, comments about lesson/unit content, giving directions and information
- Return tests, papers, assignments, etc within one week
- Hold virtual office hours for students to discuss their graded work
- Post grades regularly in ways that are effective and not confusing to students
- Acknowledge all student questions
- Use quizzes/questions that require students to review the content (self-check or automatically graded online)
- Differentiate types of inquiries and your response time (receipt of message, personal question, content question, assignment feedback). Make sure you post this information clearly to students so they know what to expect, and then make sure you fulfill these commitments

Principle 5: Emphasize Time on Task

Learning takes place when time is used effectively and actively.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Provide a quick course orientation and course overview or syllabus which indicates total time students should expect to expend each week, the importance of time on task, and time management skills
- Provide learning objectives for each module/lesson/chapter
- Indicate suggested time-on-task for each task

- Assign something for students to respond to for lesson or class
- Use quizzes/questions that require students to review the content (self-check or automatically graded online)
- Assign student partner interactions with deadlines
- Post notes from each reading assignment and ask each student to respond
- Use open-ended question to encourage extended and wide-ranging dialog
- Require online discussions
- Build in a reward system of points for all student work
- Make assignments enjoyable for students to encourage increased time-on-task
- Make students aware of time that would have been spent sitting in a face-to-face class and travelling to class for comparison to time expended on online class.
- Make sure students know the order in which to do things – e.g. required preliminary readings prior to a lecture reading or forum posting, etc.

Principle 6: Communicate High Expectations

The self-fulfilling prophecy is a powerful factor. A teacher who holds high expectations for his/her students will have students who perform well.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Include course goals, performance objectives, grading and evaluation criteria, grading rubrics, and examples of good student work in the Syllabus
- Clearly state your expectations regarding: quality, quantity, depth, breadth, and frequency of discussion participation and interaction; relative emphasis on facts, concepts, critical thinking and analysis, writing, format, and quantitative reasoning; deadlines; etiquette; internet usage; frequency of check-ins
- Post examples of high quality that you are looking for in a given task. Model high stan**d**ards and quality through example
- Convey your enthusiasm and passion for the subject
- Establish expectations regarding tone of communication (e.g. casual, informal, formal)
- Keep regular contact with students who are underperforming; refer them to appropriate student support service (e.g. the Student Success Office) if needed.

Principle 7: Respect Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

Helping a student to recognize his own learning style can improve a student's learning. Recognizing the learning styles of others can increase a student's repertoire of learning strategies.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Recognize, respect, and reward creativity
- Design more than one method of learning for students
- Design more than one method of assessment and demonstration of student achievement

- Allow students to choose from different possible modes of project presentation, established up front in a learning contract between instructor and student
- Understand and allow for different pacing
- Encourage student to use the Web and other resources and media to master course content
- Ask students to complete a learning style assessment questionnaire
- Design course materials to encourage analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation
- Recognize that distance education and online classes are not the preferred or best learning environment for some students and provide supports as necessary
- Be sensitive to possible cultural differences
- Understand and appreciate the distance learner's lifestyle, capabilities, and available resources
- Respect disabilities and be prepared to make adaptations as needed

Principle 8: Let Students Know What to Expect

By letting students know what they can expect from you and in the course many potential problems can be averted ahead of time. Often, these problems are the result of misconceptions that students bring to the online course.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Inform students of your expected email and voicemail response time (e.g. within 24 hrs, twice a week, etc.)
- Use a calendar to let students know when you won't be available
- Hold an orientation session at the beginning of the semester or provide a video introduction
- Discuss the respective roles of instructor and student in the class - independent, active, student-centered learning with the instructor as mentor/facilitator Make sure students are aware of what is expected of them
- Make a statement of your teaching philosophy in the syllabus
- Indicate the amount of time students should expect to expend each week
- Include course goals, performance objectives, grading and evaluation criteria, grading rubrics, and examples of good student work in the Syllabus
- Clearly state your expectations regarding: quality, quantity, depth, breadth, and frequency of discussion participation and interaction; relative emphasis on facts, concepts, critical thinking and analysis, writing, format, and quantitative reasoning; deadlines; etiquette; internet usage; frequency of check-ins
- Use exemplars, non-exemplars, checklists, and rubrics to guide students' performance on activities
- Indicate availability of knowledge, resources, technology, and support. Connect students with Library and tutorial support
- Dispel misconceptions about online classes by stating that classes are rigorous college-level courses that have real due dates and deadlines, interactive not necessarily independent

Principle 9: Make Effective Use of the Technology

One technology does not fit all. Use a technology that fits the needs of your students and your discipline.

Suggested Best Practices:
- Do not choose a technology simply because it is new or flashy
- Be mindful of accessibility issues facing some students. Be prepared to make accommodations
- Use technology and resources that are appropriate for a given task
- Use consistent design throughout the course
- Obtain training in the best and most effective use of each technology employed
- Interact with colleagues frequently regarding practices in online teaching and the use of technology in teaching
- Be flexible in the use of technology, using a mix of technology as appropriate
- Provide students with examples of good/reputable and bad/questionable internet sites; provide guidelines for website critique
- Provide students with examples of effective and ineffective use and design of various media (power point, etc.)
- Use online tutorials regarding research and writing skills
- Use online classroom functions (chat, forums, assignments, email) appropriate for the task
- Incorporate introductory activities as an additional objective to reinforce student mastery of basic classroom functions and technologies (email, read messages, write messages, internet searches)