

2-1-2004

Teaching Online: Planning the First Week of Class

Kristina Smolenski-Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter04>

Recommended Citation

Smolenski-Nelson, K. (2004). Teaching Online: Planning the First Week of Class. *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values* 4(1). Available <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2004/01/smolenski.php>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 4 (2004) by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu.

Teaching Online: Planning the First Week of Class

Rights

Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.

Teaching Online: Planning the First Week of Class

Posted on **February 1, 2004** by **Editor**



By **Dr. Kristina Smolenski-Nelson** <smoskall@hotmail.com>

The first week of any class, whether traditional or online, is always the most important week. First weeks are for making impressions; for letting students get a feel for their teacher, a feel for their fellow classmates (many of them whom, in an online environment, they will never meet face to face) as well as a feel for the actual class itself.

For many online students, this may be their first online class; thus they not only have assignments to complete as well as the factor of getting to know other students and their teacher, they also have a system and software to get used to. This can be difficult for some students, especially those that are not extremely computer savvy. So, what can be done to help these students as well as other students who are used to the online environment, but perhaps just being shaken from the fact that their winter or summer breaks are over, and they actually have work to do?

I have discovered that not all schools have online orientations for their students, so it is often the teachers' responsibility to explain how to use the system. I have found that if the class never meets, as most online classes do not, the best way to provide students with information about accessing and browsing the course is to e-mail them an instruction guide, as step by step as possible, written by me specifically for my class.

For most students, this removes a lot of fear from the online environment. Just about everybody has an e-mail address and understands how to use e-mail and open an attachment, so sending out the instructions ensures that they will not only gain easy access to them, but they will also feel that they have accomplished the first necessary task in the class. Thus, the online environment becomes less frightening. Facing new experiences with a detailed "how to do this and that" list helps to remove the threat of the online environment. It also provides students with their teacher's e-mail address, which they can respond to if they have any questions about the class.

Another big issue with the online environment, I have noticed, is that students do not usually get their books before the class starts. Most do not even have the book for the first week.

Sometimes the school receives the books late, or the students do not know what books they need, because they could not access the syllabus until the first day, or any variety of excuses imaginable.

I have come to accept that about 30 per cent of my students usually do not have the book on the first day, and about 15 per cent will not have the book for the first week, and all of them will have a good excuse why not. So instead of letting them fall behind and make up their work later, I usually assign some first week work that does not require the book and allows the students to develop a further ease when using the online course.

My most common first week assignments are to have the students read their syllabus and access and read their course agreement. I will usually also have them post an introduction to the discussion area and to respond to each other's work. This gets them used to the discussion tool thread. It also allows them to get to know each other, which is very important, since they will not see each other but still must learn to work together.

Sometimes I will also give them a brief online article to read and quiz them on it just so they get used to the quiz area. Everything is relatively laid back and allows them to not only finish their work without an excuse, but get used to the class as well. These types of activities are also wonderful for students who may need a week or two to transition from break time to school time.

Often, students feel overwhelmed their first weeks back after vacation; they may be trying to still sign up for courses and by books, and often are distracted. Giving a light load that requires them to get used to the class gives them a little time to transition, even if they have taken an online class before. This provides both students who are and are not used to the online environment with a growing comfort zone.

As a teacher, during the first week, you should be logging into your class at least twice a day to check and see if students are asking questions in the discussion areas about how to use the course. Try to post something to the discussion board whenever you login so the students know and feel your presence. Students, I have found, really enjoy this, especially during the first week. If they know their teacher is there for them, they are bound to respond better because they feel supported and encouraged.

Also, check your e-mail at least three times a day to answer any of those "how do I go here and use this" type questions. During the first week, you will get more of these types of questions than during any other week, and it is important that you develop rapport with your students and to let them know that you, as the teacher, are going to be there for them.

It is also important to make students aware of their helpdesk. I will usually post contact

information for the helpdesk in my initial e-mail to the students, and then post it again somewhere in my class. The helpdesk can take much of the load off of a teacher during the first week; they can also answer several software and login questions that you, as the teacher, may not have access to, or be aware of.

When students have technical difficulties, they must be instructed not to rely on their teacher, because if they contact their teacher and their teacher just refers them back to the helpdesk, they wind up losing time. This is crucial if they have an assignment due and cannot login for some reason. If they are aware of the existence of the helpdesk from day one, they can skip that delay and go straight to the helpdesk, probably getting their issue resolved within 12 hours or so, which seems to be the typical help turnaround time for most students.

Regardless of this, there will probably still be times when computer issues arise and students either do not get a resolution from the helpdesk in time, or perhaps it is a weekend or at night and the helpdesk is closed. If this occurs, you have to give the student an alternate way to contact you; I find voicemail is usually the best. This way, the student can contact their teacher before their assignment is due and ask for an extension, technical difficulty or not.

Do not let students use technical difficulties as an excuse unless they contact you prior to an assignment's deadline and ask for an extension. Technical difficulties, whether real or non-existent (we often have no way of telling), can run rampant if you allow an extension after a deadline has already passed. As a teacher, you must establish yourself as the leader and the deadline initiator, and deadlines should never change unless you know ahead of time that a student is sick, has a funeral to go to, or has a computer problem. This prevents students from "making up" excuses simply because they forgot about a deadline, and also gives an element of fairness to the class for those students who have worked hard to meet the deadline.

Using all of these ideas can help an instructor get through the first week of his or her online class with relative ease. It will also allow the students to feel less stress, which will lead to a happier, healthier online teaching environment throughout the term.

For more information, see:

[http://www.umt.edu/facultysupport/resources/
Faculty_resources_first_week.doc](http://www.umt.edu/facultysupport/resources/Faculty_resources_first_week.doc)

http://www.cbc2.org/distance/docs/intro_info.asp

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by **Editor**. Bookmark the **permalink** [<http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=2922>] .

ONE THOUGHT ON "TEACHING ONLINE: PLANNING THE FIRST WEEK OF CLASS"

Pablo Giza

on **January 30, 2014 at 5:18 PM** said:

Hiya very cool web site!! Man .. Excellent .. Superb .. I will bookmark your web site and take the feeds additionally