

QUESTIONS TO ASK TO DESIGN AN EFFECTIVE ONLINE COURSE

What do you really want students to take away from the course, apart from the foundational knowledge you want them to gain?

Think about how you want students

- to apply what they learn (determining the kinds of assessments and activities you'll want to build),
- to connect the course to prior experience and other subjects (affecting the types of discussion and reflection you ask them to do),
- to engage or collaborate with each other or with the people outside the class (giving you ideas for group work and discussion tools),
- to be better students in this area (suggesting what technical skills or study skills might also be worth the time to incorporate into your teaching)

How can students tell that they've mastered what you want them to learn and met the other goals you have for them?

There are so many interesting online tools that you can likely find projects or types of practice that are more authentic and rigorous for students than just exams and papers. Think especially about the projects and technology that professionals use in the field. You'll also have options for different tools and processes to deliver meaningful feedback, which is crucial in online courses.

What are the (say) 5 best things a student could do in a typical week to learn and practice?

Because online courses don't naturally give students the same sense of structure as when they're attending in person, it's important to establish a clear routine that students can get used to. Imagine you have that student sitting down to the computer five times during the week and you want them to have mastered X. What should they do? In what order? What mix of (1) getting information (e.g., web lessons, ebooks, short lecture videos), (2) doing things (e.g., practice, projects, research, formative assessment), and (3) reflecting or discussing? If you'll do videos or other instructional content, how can you chunk and sequence that content as part of those five spans of time?

What are the best ways to present your instructional content?

Thinking of content as one supporting part of that weekly routine can help you build a more effective course than if you try to replicate the way you present content in person (through lecture, for example). Different instructional goals often require different media; slide presentations might work for some situations, but you may see times when it's better to give students more than that (e.g., animations, lab demo videos) or less (e.g., just textbook chapters, journal articles, or text case studies).

How can students, and you, tell if they're keeping up as the course progresses?

There are numerous mechanisms for doing formative assessment online: you could offer low-stakes quizzes, have students post their most-confusing topics to the discussion board every week, or set up some sort of peer or group reflection or cross checks.

These can all keep students on track and engaged and can impel them to take greater ownership of their learning--all of which is especially important online, where you have no way of *seeing* who's confused or who's not paying attention.

How can you give students access to your expertise and your personality? What could they benefit from?

You don't need to put your face on every page, but how can you give students access to your expertise, your passion, your concern? What can you offer that a textbook, publisher website, or another instructor can't? To introduce the course and each week, you might use audio or video messages to get your presence across more effectively than just text. And you can incorporate synchronous-communication tools (such as CarmenConnect) into the course routine to give students an opportunity to see you or talk to you directly (perhaps in the form of office hours or periodic study sessions).

How can you get students to learn from one another and benefit from one another's experience and presence in the course?

Online courses can feel isolating; you have to be deliberate about creating opportunities and space for students to talk. What would they benefit from sharing notes about? What times could they benefit from each other's feedback? How could they benefit from seeing each other's work or progress? When would they get further ahead if they collaborated? Using Carmen discussions, U.OSU.edu blogs, or other outside tools, you can pretty easily set up activities where students work in pairs or groups or as a community.

How can you get students to enjoy the course and care about what you're teaching?

What works for you, in general, to pique students' interest? What interests you about this subject, and how can you share that passion and build it into the students' experience? What can you do to make the routine of the course pleasant, surprising, or interesting? What can you do to make the online course space more inviting? How can you use stories or a basic narrative to engage students better?

This last set of questions can help you decide where to spend the most time creating activities or content (i.e., focus on the things that you care about most and that will interest students the most). You can also make decisions about the visual style for the course, including the photos you include and the look and feel of your slides or lessons. You can decide where to deviate from the routine--how to make sure students experience the course as more than passive content consumption.

