Humanizing Virtual Learning

Humanizing Virtual Learning

A Guide to Creating Connection, Engagement, and Inclusivity

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO; TRENT UNIVERSITY; AND CONESTOGA COLLEGE

Contents

About this course – Start here!

This course is designed to provide post-secondary educators (instructors and academic support unit [ASU] staff in the college and university sectors) with a foundation in high impact practices that foster real **engagement**, create **authentic connection** and **community**, support academic integrity, and **provide valuable teaching and learning experiences** online. Whether you're creating a new online, remote, or blended course, revising an existing course, or facilitating your first-ever online, remote, or blended course, your own goals in taking this course will determine the outcomes you take away.

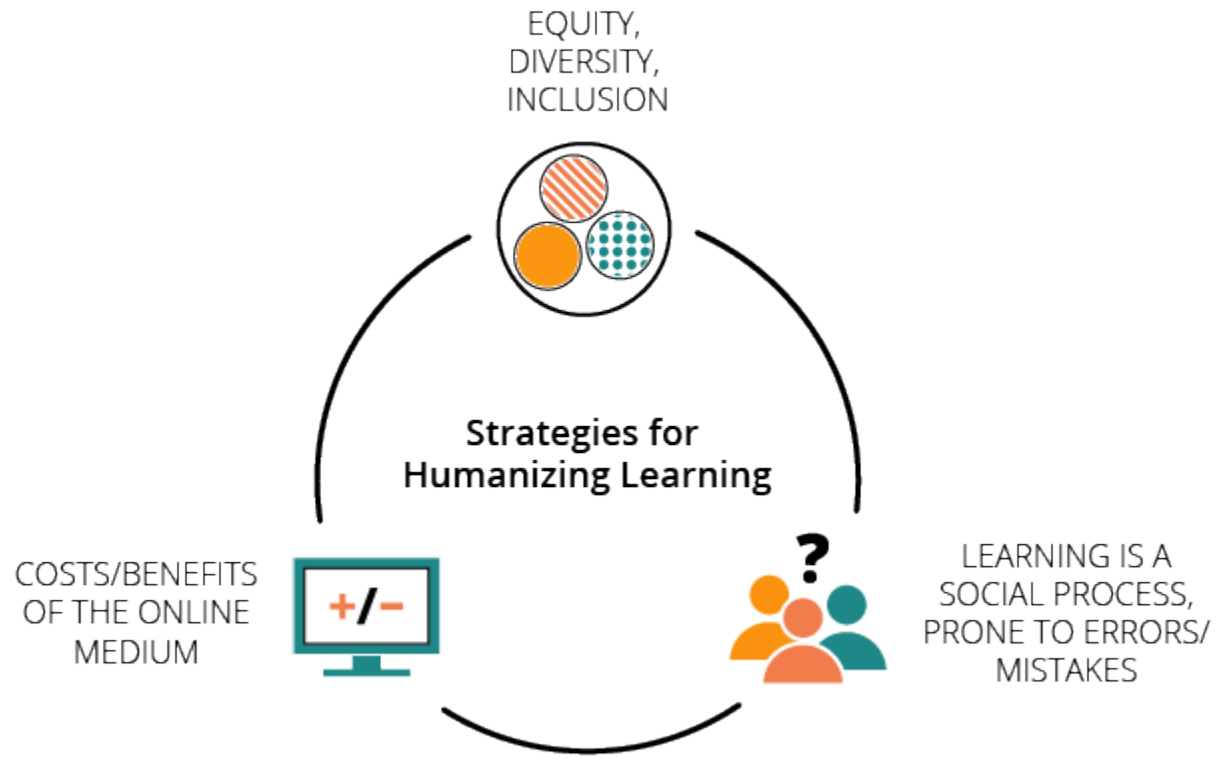
What you can take away from this course:

- **Ideas, strategies, and resources** (e.g., templates, rubrics, and lots of real examples) you can use in the creation (or revision) of your course that will help you foster **engagement, connection, and interaction** in your virtual courses and more rewarding teaching and learning experiences.
- The design and creation of inclusive and equitable learning experiences that feel authentic and engage both learners and instructors, drawing on frameworks such as **User Experience Design for Learning (UXDL)** and **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**, and principles of **equity, diversity, decolonization** and **inclusivity** (EDDI).
- Skill in identifying key affordances and challenges to teaching and learning in virtual environments and identify relevant **strategies to help leverage the affordances and mitigate challenges** in teaching virtually.
- The design of or ideas for new **assessments** that draw on humanizing **strategies that support academic integrity (AI)** and reduce the feasibility of and temptation to commit AI violations for your learners.
- creating opportunities in your virtual course for **meaningful interactions**, better **engagement**, deeper **connections**, and contribute to inclusive and equitable learning experiences.
- developing skills and confidence in **communicating with your learners online** (e.g., emails and discussion forums), including the ability to recognize and **tactfully address challenging topics/content** that may trigger some learners, as well as acts of **aggression** or **micro-aggressions** in online interactions.
- Identifying ways to garner **learner feedback** and taking a **reflective, iterative improvement approach in your course design** and facilitation, acknowledging that humanizing learning is a career-long journey.

Taking steps that help to break down barriers to learning, increase access, acknowledge diversity, and create opportunity for real connection and engagement is commonly referred to as **humanizing virtual learning**. Humanizing online learning is a broad and somewhat open-ended pursuit because almost every strategy one employs to create a quality online course can help to humanize your course, your learners, and you. From the design of assessments, to the presentation of content, to how instructors communicate with learners, every aspect of your online teaching can serve to humanize the experience.

Always at the heart of the work of humanizing learning, however, is an intention to improve teaching and learning online by:

- taking into consideration **principles of equity** and acknowledging the **diversity** in the backgrounds, abilities, and limitations of both the human who is creating the online instructional materials and teaching online, as well as the individual humans who are learning together and co-creating the learning community;
- understanding that human learning is inherently a **social process**, whereby knowledge and skills are shared in a way that enables growth and transformation (sometimes in both teacher and learner) and makes space for this human process of learning, where **mistakes are inevitable** and **reflection**, **revision**, and **iteration** are paramount for both the instructor and the learners; and
- aiming to leverage the **affordances of the medium of virtual learning** to create fulfilling teaching and learning experiences, while mitigating (and/or working wisely within) the **limitations of the medium**.



Humanizing learning online seeks to use the affordances of the virtual environment to promote equity and diversity and acknowledges the social nature of learning, creating a safe space for failure and growth.
Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

While this description is big picture and may sound a bit lofty, it is meant to provide some guiding principles and some goals to work towards. Humanizing learning is not an all-or-nothing pursuit, and any steps you feel comfortable taking

- to support equity, diversity, and inclusivity
- that acknowledges the social and trial-and-error nature of human learning and development, and
- that aims to leverage the affordances of the online medium and reduce barriers to learning

will enhance the experience of teaching and learning online for both you and your learners. If these are goals you aspire to, then this course is for you!

A note about the intended audience

This course is designed for educators in **postsecondary education (PSE)**, and tips and examples will be grounded in this context. However, many principles and examples will translate readily to a K-12 or professional development context.

Customizing your approach to this course

Before creating this course we did our research and interviewed instructors and ASU staff from post-secondary institutions across Ontario to learn what they were looking for to help them develop strategies and skills in humanizing learning. The design and content in this course reflects the results of that analysis.

What we heard loud and clear is that instructors want tangible and applicable strategies presented in short and readily-digestible sections, covering a broad range of topics that are easy to find based on one's interests, questions, goals, and time. One of the most consistent requests was to see these principles in action with examples and case studies across various disciplines, class sizes, and class formats (seminar, lecture-based, lab-based, etc.). We have created this course with these needs in mind.

This course takes a learner-centred approach, and we encourage you to be self-directed and self-determined in your learning path, navigating to the topics you are most interested in and creating your own customized materials and resources as you work through the material. We designed this course to serve ASU staff and instructors with a range of experiences in virtual learning, whether you are completely new to teaching virtually and are feeling overwhelmed by the daunting task of creating a brand new course or are experienced and looking to tweak and revise your online or blended course in a few targeted ways, or are teaching a course you haven't designed and are looking for ways to set yourself and your learners up for success.

We have divided this course into two parts, each with two modules. The first module of each part focuses on strategies that foster **authentic interaction and connection**, while the second module focuses on how to apply principles of **equity and inclusivity**:

Part 1 – Design and Development is dedicated to design and development of resources. This is where you'll want to start if you are designing or re-designing a virtual course or resources (online or blended).

There are two modules in Part 1:

- Module 1 Designing for Connection
- Module 2 Designing for Inclusivity

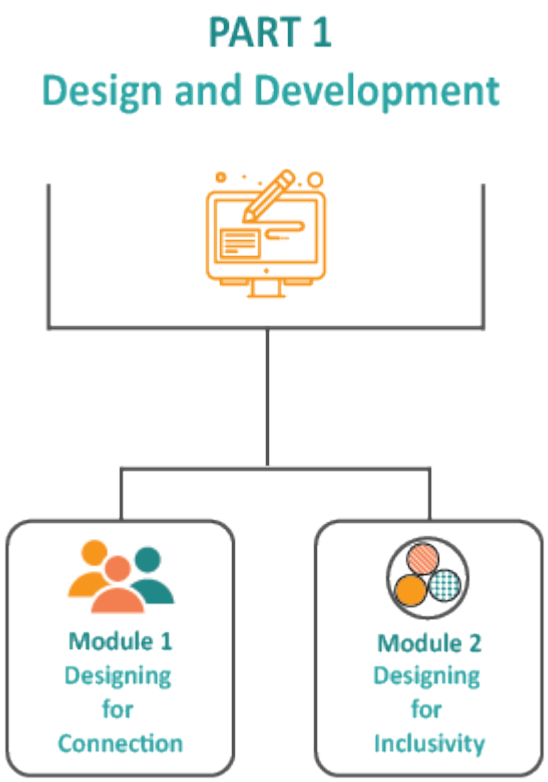


Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

Part 2 – Delivery and Facilitation is dedicated to the delivery of virtual courses or course components. This may be where you'd like to start if your course is already designed and developed and you want to jump right into teaching strategies you can use to foster interactions, communication, connection, and community.

There are two modules in Part 2:

- **Module 3 Facilitating for Connection**
- **Module 4 Facilitating for Inclusivity**

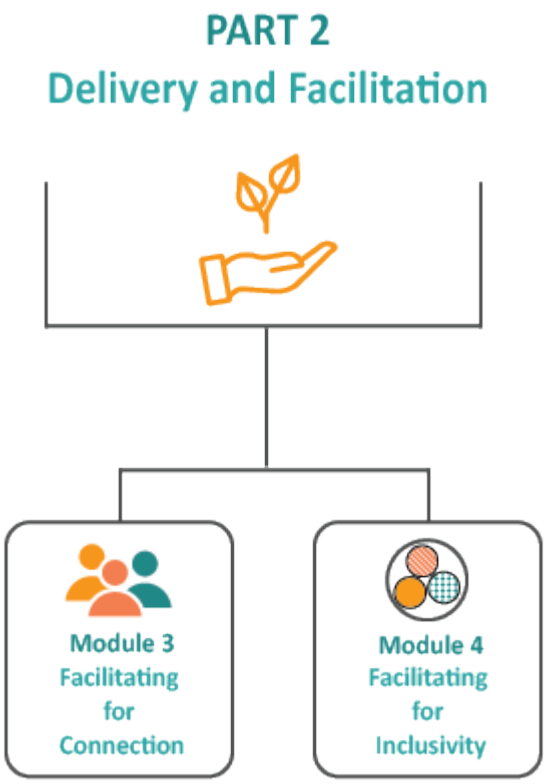


Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

Every module contains the following sections:

Key principles: A short introduction to the theory and related evidence of high-impact principles that foster humanizing learning. For those who would like to learn more or dive a little deeper into a topic, these sections will include resources for **Going deeper**.
Strategies in action: If you are less interested in the "what" and "why" and are really looking for the "how" you might jump to the many examples, templates, assessments, and lived experiences found in this section, which are drawn from real virtual courses across disciplines and learning contexts.
Reflect and apply: If you'd like to directly apply key principles or try out an example by reworking some of your own course materials as you go, this section provides guidance on how to customize strategies for your own virtual course, assessments, and teaching resources.

Humanizing learning is a career-long journey

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Each module focuses on high-impact strategies and examples, but few online courses employ all these strategies well. Be kind to yourself and recognize that humanizing learning and teaching in more inclusive and equitable ways is a career-long journey. So if you are new to virtual teaching and learning (or even if you are a veteran), we encourage you to start by selecting a couple of areas to focus on, or to **choose one simple strategy** in each area that you can integrate into your course(s) that feels manageable. Aim to continue to iterate, build, and grow your approach to virtual course design and facilitation over time.

Where to start?

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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=4#h5p-20

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Navigating this course

There are three ways to navigate through the content of this course:

1. Click the **Contents** bar in the navigation panel to navigate between sections.
2. Use the **Module overview** page for quick links to the sections within a module.
3. Use the **Previous/Next** links in the footer at the very bottom of the screen to go back and forth through the content

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Accessibility statement

We developed this course with a commitment to accessibility and usability for all learners.

The accessibility of this course was assessed by the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo. This review was based on the WCAG 2.0 Guidelines at success criteria Level AA. The course authors have addressed all known accessibility issues to the best of their abilities.

The following known accessibility issue persists and may cause difficulties for some persons with disabilities:

- **Previous** and **Next** page buttons are difficult to find and the use of orange text over a dark purple background is not optimal.

This issue was not resolved because it is a limitation of Pressbooks.

About the authors and development team

We are a team of instructional designers and educational developers who have brought our combined years' experience in online learning to the design and development of this course. Although we come from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, we recognize that we do not (and cannot) encompass every experience. As a result, we have sought to incorporate equity, diversity, decolonization and inclusion (EDDI) principles into all the concepts and approaches we highlight throughout the course in order to acknowledge the diversity of our learners, instructors, and educational support staff in the online learning environment.

We also humbly acknowledge that we have co-created this learning material across the traditional lands of many Indigenous Peoples, including the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Seneca, Mississaugas of the Credit, Neutral, and Ojibway/Chippewa peoples. Many Métis, Inuit, and First Nations from across Turtle Island also call these lands home today. We express gratitude to those that reside here, for their teachings about the land and our relations, and hope to honour those teachings through this course and through the work we do together during and after this course.

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Copying, modifying, and re-using this resource

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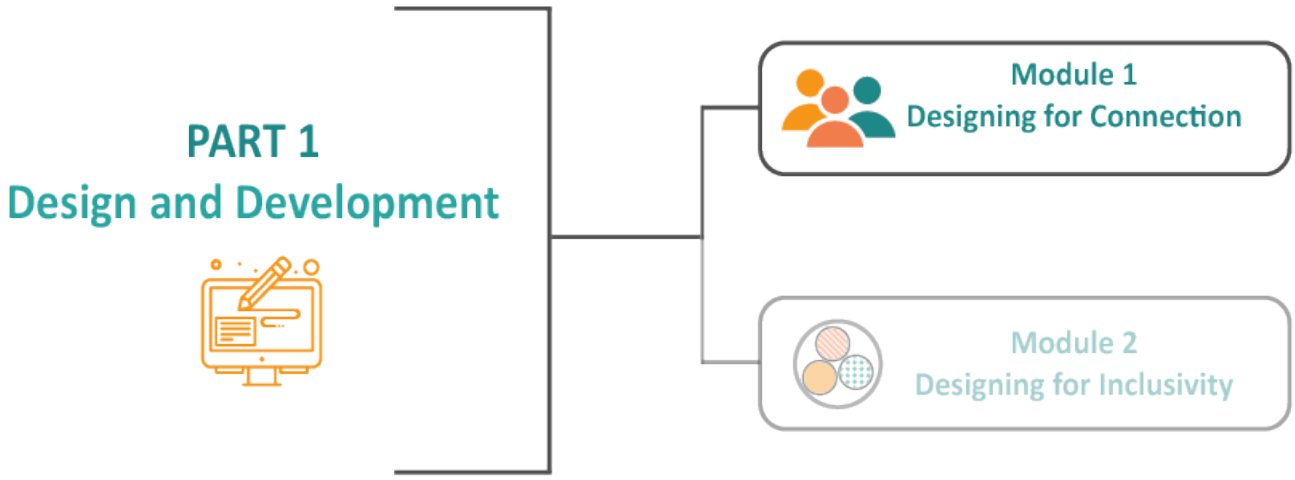
MODULE 1: DESIGNING FOR CONNECTION

1.1 Module overview

Module introduction video ~2 mins



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Learning outcomes

What you can take away from this module

- Strategies to help you understand the **diverse characteristics of your virtual learners**, some of the challenges they may face in your virtual class, and how to mitigate some of these challenges by leveraging the affordances of teaching virtually.
- Strategies to inspire **courageous learning** and create opportunities for **rewarding teaching** experiences.
- The creation of **a course outline** that starts with the **dimensions of significant learning** that you hope your learners will take away and an **assessment plan** that is aligned with these intended outcomes.
- Ideas for how you can **create connection and interaction** between yourself and your learners, your learners and course content, and learners with each other through seeing lots of real examples of **authentic activities, assessments**, and **course designs**.

Quick tips and tricks: Pick one strategy

Just a reminder, these modules are not intended to be completed all in one sitting and are designed for you to pick and choose the strategies you would like to work on. The goal was to create a resource rich in examples

and strategies that will resonate with many different instructors, across disciplines and teaching contexts. We encourage you to pause between sections (A, B, C, D...), think about applications to your own course, and then identify one strategy that resonates with you and feels 'doable'. Our hope is that you continue to humanize your virtual teaching iteratively and you can return to this resource again and again as you explore new strategies.

This module will introduce virtual learning environments and the learner experience, along with course design considerations and practical strategies that will foster valuable and engaging virtual teaching and learning experiences that foster significant learning.

While virtual courses differ from in-person teaching, much of what you do naturally in the classroom that helps your learners connect with you, with each other, and with the content and skills you teach, can be achieved in virtual contexts. Humanizing learning in virtual learning contexts sometimes does require a little more intentionality, forethought, planning, and preparation to reduce the transactional distance between you and your learners. Michael G. Moore defines **transactional distance** this way

[Transactional distance is] a psychological and communication space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner.

(Moore, 1991)

All courses, no matter how they are delivered, involve some level of transactional distance, but virtual courses in particular can involve much more of this type of distance than their face-to-face counterparts. Transactional distance has almost nothing to do with how far apart people might be physically—but rather has to do with how distanced we feel psychologically.

Michael G. Moore (Moore, n.d.)

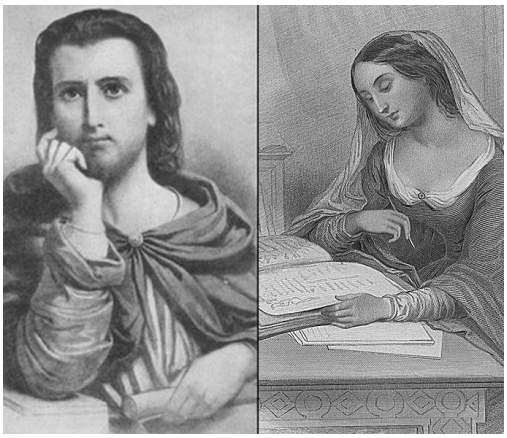
Connection isn't limited to in-person

The idea that authentic connection and engaging teaching and learning cannot occur in a virtual context is a persistent notion, however, this is certainly not necessarily the case. While some may have mixed experiences while teaching and learning virtually, challenges connecting in virtual learning contexts are not inherent to the medium of virtual communication or communication across great distances, time zones, or temporal lags. In fact, there are many notable cases across history and most of us have direct experiences of authentic connection across great physical distance and temporal lags. Dr. Rhonda Dubec provides a lovely reminder of this:

Through nothing but letters and over long time periods, people have established life-long relationships, romances, and deeply passionate things. So, it's not the medium at all which is the principal challenge, it's the engagement methodology. Because you look at Isaac Newton, Abelard and Heloise, and the collection of letters that go back to ... Babylon and all these relationships .... There are life-long relationships between teacher and student, between friends, between colleagues, between lovers. These relationships were sustained, life-long, over continents, even though it could take a year to get a letter ... [There are many examples of] scientists (e.g., Isaac Newton) who had intercontinental collaborations and invented incredible machines, innovations, new theories and everything with nothing but letter relationships.

(R. Dubec, personal communication, April 21, 2021)

Our hope is that you will come away from this unit equipped with several implementable strategies for designing virtual learning experiences that help to reduce that transactional distance and facilitate authentic connections between **learners with instructor(s)**, **learners with each other**, and **learners with the course content**.



Abelard (unknown, 1900) left and Heloise (unknown, 1883) right

Sections in this module

You can jump to any of the sections in this module by clicking the links below or using the left-side navigation menu.

Strategies in action examples

Below are links to strategies, examples, instructor testimonials, and templates for those who would like to jump right to exploring humanizing principles and strategies in action applied in real virtual courses.

1.2 Strategies in action for virtual learning contexts and virtual learners

- Strategies in action: Making the most of asynchronous delivery
- Strategies in action: Making the most of synchronous delivery

1.3 Strategies in action for significant and courageous learning

- Strategies in action: Alignment tables

1.4 Strategies in action for learner–instructor connection

- Strategies in action: Introducing yourself, the course, and welcoming learners
- Strategies in action: Providing learners with your professional perspective
- Strategies in action: Modeling and inspiring connections with your learners
- Strategies in action: Creating opportunities for feedback on learning
- Strategies in action: Seeking learner feedback

1.5 Strategies in action for learner–content connection

- Strategies in action: Examples of UXDL applied to virtual courses
- Strategies in action: Authentic and personally meaningful assessments
- Strategies in action: Activities and assignments that build learner-content connection

1.6 Strategies in action for learner–learner connection

- Strategies in action: Designing meaningful social interactions and discussions
- Strategies in action: Assessment-based interaction – Group projects
- Strategies in action: Peer-to-peer teaching and assessments

Reflect and apply activities

Reflect and apply

Below are links to all the Reflect and apply activities for those interested in diving right into applying principles and examples to their own course design and teaching context.

1.2 Virtual learning contexts and virtual learners

- Reflect and apply: Getting to know your learners
- Reflect and apply: Are you making the most of the delivery formats?

1.3 Setting the stage for significant and courageous learning

- Reflection on transformational learning and courageous learning strategies
- Reflect and apply: Aligning learning outcomes, assessments, and connection

1.4 Learner–instructor connection: Designing courses with personality

- Reflect and apply: Creating the conditions for courageous learning

1.5 Learner–content connection: Designing valuable learning experiences

- Reflect and apply: Designing with the learner in mind

1.6 Learner–learner connection: Designing authentic peer teaching and learning opportunities

- Reflect and apply: Reflecting on our learner-learner interactions
- Reflect and apply: Creating opportunity for authentic peer connections

Going deeper resources

Going deeper

Below are links to additional resources on various topics for those interested in learning more about a particular topic.

1.2 Virtual learning contexts and virtual learners

- Literature Review: Online Teaching and Learning – Synchronous or Asynchronous? (PDF)
- 21 Study Tips for Online Classes Success (PDF)

- Getting Ready to Learn Online (self-paced online module)
- Engagement and Community-Building Activities (PDF)

1.3 Setting the stage for significant and courageous learning

- Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences*. Jossey Bass.
- Using Fink's Taxonomy in Course Design
- Fink's Significant Learning Outcomes
- Fink's Significant Learning Outcome Verbs (PDF)
- Incorporating a Holistic Framework in Curriculum Development

1.4 Learner-instructor connection: Designing courses with personality

- Jaggars, S. & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance? *Computers & Education, 95*, 270–284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.01.014
- Lowenthal, P., Dunlap, J., & Snelson, C. (2017). Live Synchronous Web Meetings in Asynchronous Online Courses: Reconceptualizing Virtual Office Hours. *Online Learning,* 21(4), 177-194. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i4.1285
- Brené Brown: Building Brave Spaces for Students
- Brené Brown | Daring Classrooms (~34 min video)
- Remote Teaching: Seminars and Discussion-Based Courses
- Online Discussion Tips for Students
- VALUE Rubrics
- Teaching in the Era of Bots: Students Need Humans Now More Than Ever
- Humanizing – Michelle Pacansky-Brock

1.5 Learner–content connection: Designing valuable learning experiences

- Troop, M., White, D., Wilson, K.E., & Zeni, P. (2020). The user experience design for learning (UXDL) framework: The undergraduate perspective. *The Canadian Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 11*(3). https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2020.3.8328
- How Do We Create DESIRABLE Online Learning Experiences?
- How Do We Create USEFUL Online Learning Experiences?
- How Do We Create INTUITIVE (Findable & Usable) Online Learning Experiences?
- How Do We Create CREDINLE Online Learning Experiences?
- How Do We Create ACCESSIBLE Online Learning Experiences?

1.6 Learner–learner connection: Designing authentic peer teaching and learning opportunities

- Top 300 Tools for Learning
- An Interactive Rubric for Evaluating eLearning Tools
- Peer Instruction
- Fostering Engagement: Facilitating Courses in Higher Education – 5b. How Student–Student Interaction Leads to Engagement
- Brown, R. E. (2001). The process of community-building in distance learning classes. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 5*(2), 18–35.
- Downing, K. J., Lam, T., Kwong, T., Downing, W., & Chan, S. (2007). Creating interaction in online learning: A case study. *Research in Learning Technology, 15*(3), 201–215.
- Remote Teaching: Seminars and Discussion-Based Courses

- Graduate Literature Seminar Discussion Instructions (PDF)
- Graduate Literature Seminar Rubric (DOCX)

1.2 Virtual learning contexts and virtual learners

Key principles: Virtual learning contexts

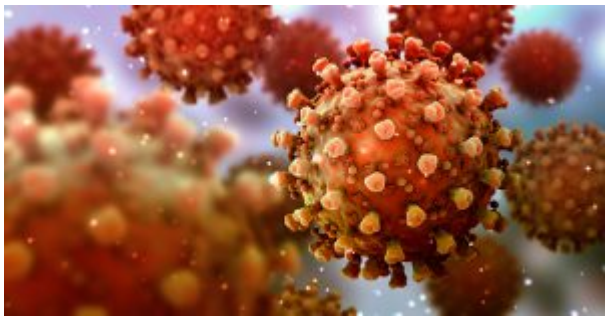
Since the winter of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, many instructors and learners have been teaching and learning in various **virtual learning contexts**, which include:

- **fully online courses**, which were thoughtfully developed before and during the pandemic and will persist even as more learners return to campuses around the world;
- **remote courses**, which were developed (in many cases quite quickly) in response to institutional classroom closures due to the pandemic. Some of these courses will continue being offered online, even as learners start to return to the classroom;
- **blended courses (hybrid courses)**, which involve some blend of online learning components and in-person classroom activities, which are typically focused on active learning, problem-solving, hands-on application, and interactions that are more difficult to do asynchronously or virtually.

One thing that many instructors and learners are craving and missing is the human and social connection that has been interrupted in their academic, work, and social lives. There are many ways to enhance virtual learning experiences, for both instructors and learners, to help them feel more connected, engaged, and included. Before we launch into these, let's take a moment to think about our virtual learners, what is unique to the virtual learning context, and what we hope virtual learning will look like post-pandemic.

Note

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant point in history for most of us and had a huge impact on virtual learning in higher education, resulting in many lessons learned and some that we are still learning. One of the biggest growth areas that came from the challenges of this time is greater awareness, understanding, and interest in humanizing learning and the importance of institutions, instructors, and learners in growing all of our capacities to support mental health and wellness, equity, and inclusivity in virtual teaching in higher education. Now that most instructors and learners have experienced virtual education, there is incredible buy-in to build capacity in delivering courses in a more flexible way. Many welcome a more fully online or blended future in education, but would like to see it **done right—with humans front and centre of the experience**.



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Key principles: Characteristics of your virtual learners

While online and blended courses have been widely available at many universities and colleges around the world for over a decade, the number of online and blended course offerings significantly increased in the few years prior to the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated that growth drastically, as just about all learners

experienced learning in virtual contexts while at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are some important differences to keep in mind about virtual teaching in a pandemic, relative to virtual teaching before and after the pandemic:

- the pandemic was a period marked by a lot of anxiety and uncertainty for many, and isolation, loss, and trauma for some;
- most instructors, academic support unit (ASU) staff, and learners had not planned for the pivot to virtual teaching and felt under-prepared and overwhelmed; and
- many of us did not really choose to work, learn, and/or teach in these virtual contexts, but we did our best to rise to the challenges.

During the pandemic, most learners became virtual learners and with little choice in the matter; post-pandemic, learners have regained their agency, and with it, we'll see the re-emergence of self-selection patterns. These patterns may mirror those of pre-pandemic times, in terms of who tended to select virtual learning contexts. For instance, research has shown that online learners typically:

- chose the online format for its **flexibility** (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Braun, 2008; Troop et al., 2020);
- tend to be slightly older, **more mature** learners ranging from about 25–50 years old (Moore & Kearskey, 2005);
- bring **rich life experiences** to the virtual classroom (Bostin & Ice, 2011; O'Shea et al., 2015); and
- have more **commitments outside the classroom** such as busy work schedules or family responsibilities, which can pose challenges to them (Greenland & Moore, 2014).

Virtual learners are a diverse group. Learners who tend to choose virtual learning contexts, such as fully online courses tend to be slightly older, mature learners, from diverse backgrounds and they often choose the virtual context for the flexibility it offers.

The pandemic shed light on and fed into some of the challenges in virtual learning, but as a result, people working in higher education have a greater awareness of the issues, tools, strategies, and resources to help mitigate some of these challenges.

This diversity in the virtual classroom can be a beautiful thing, but accommodating so many different learners, learning from home (which is not a safe or quiet place for all learners), across many time zones, with technology and bandwidth limitations has brought to the foreground some of the barriers that virtual learners face, which are often tied to and compounded by social and economic inequities. Understanding that these issues may be at play, to varying extents, for many of your learners is the first step towards mitigating the negative impact these can have on learning through your course design.

While one of the great benefits of virtual learning is the flexibility it affords, some learners may struggle with this, as virtual learning is more self-paced and can be more self-directed, which requires more self-regulation, and time management skills that take time to develop and many teens and young adults are still learning. In addition, virtual learners may have less control over their learning environment and may experience challenges associated with sharing space, dealing with distractions outside their control, and internet and technology access issues.

Reflect and apply: Getting to know your learners

When designing your course, including content, interactions, activities, and assessments, it is important to understand who your learners are.

Can you answer the following questions about your learners?

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the question in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#h5p-6

For more information on how to use surveys to get to know your learners see the Strategies in action section in 1.4 Learner–Instructor Connection: Designing Courses With Personality called "Getting to Know Your Learners with Surveys."

Virtual learning requires a greater degree of self-regulation, self-motivation, metacognition, and self-direction from learners (Brown, 1997; Tsay et al., 2000; Khiat, 2015; Kırmızı, 2015; Johnson, 2015) and not all learners and instructors realize how difficult this aspect of online learning can be. There are, however, many design and facilitation strategies that have a big impact on learner motivation, persistence, metacognition, and academic outcomes and success in virtual learning contexts (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Jaggars & Xu, 2016).

Before we get into some high impact design strategies to help build authentic connection and learning, let's take a closer look at a few of the big challenges and affordances of virtual learning.

Key principles: Challenges and affordances of virtual learning

Some instructors, teaching assistants (TAs), and learners thrive in the virtual teaching and learning environment, appreciating some of the affordances that virtual learning offers, such as the enhanced **flexibility** of providing content and interactions **asynchronously**, which can give both instructors and learners additional time to prepare, engage, process, integrate, and reflect. While others find virtual teaching and learning to be a lonely space, missing face-to-face interactions, and frustrated by struggles related to and requirements to learn many different technologies and tools. Instructors, TAs, preceptors, and learners can experience access challenges resulting from bandwidth limitations in different regions, which segregates learners based on geographical

location and social-economic status (SES). The most significant access barriers occur during **synchronous** learning, interactions, and assessments.

Definitions

Asynchronous: includes formats that are not live. Learners can interact with content, assessments, instructors, and peers in their own time, rather than at a specific time. Asynchronous design typically still includes deadlines, but learners are given a window of time.

Synchronous: includes live formats. Learners are required to interact with content, assessments, and/or facilitators, and peers at a specific set time.

Source: Fostering Engagement: Facilitating Courses in Higher Education

The following table provides a summary of some of the challenges and affordances or benefits of synchronous and asynchronous approaches to:

- course content delivery (e.g., synchronous video lectures vs. asynchronous self-paced modules),
- interactions (e.g., synchronous video discussions vs. asynchronous discussion forums),
- activities and assessments (e.g., synchronous timed tests or oral tests vs. take-home open book test).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#h5p-10

Challenges and affordances of synchronous aspects of virtual courses table (PDF)

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#h5p-9

Challenges and affordances of asynchronous aspects of virtual courses table (PDF)

Going deeper

For those wanting to take a deeper dive into the literature on synchronous vs. asynchronous virtual delivery before making design decisions, here is a literature review that provides more detail in this area. It focuses on factors for successful online courses, dimensions for comparing synchronous and asynchronous instruction, along with the research on affordances and limitations of both delivery methods:

- Literature Review: Online Teaching and Learning – Synchronous or Asynchronous? (PDF)

If you'd like to explore more on how students develop online learning skills, see the following article:

- How Students Develop Online Learning Skills (article)

Resources for students to help them learn how to learn in virtual learning contexts:

- Study Tips for Online Classes Success (article)
- Getting Ready to Learn Online (self-paced online module)

Strategies in action: Making the most of asynchronous delivery

It can be a challenge to envision how an existing traditional course might be converted to an online-only offering. But, with some thoughtfulness and creativity, you may be surprised with how you can create a welcoming and engaging learning space. Making some decisions early on regarding what is a 'must have' and a 'nice to have' and how much resources you have (time and institutional support) will also dictate what you can realistically prepare for your learners. To help you appreciate what this might look like, two examples are presented below.

Moving the laboratory into a virtual classroom

In this video, Dr. Cynthia Pruss, Queen's University, outlines her experiences and lessons learned in moving a core undergraduate laboratory to the online space. She explains the important features of the course as it originally was run and how she ensured the online experience remained as equivalent as possible. She also reflects on how the process went and how students reported they engaged and enjoyed the course. This course is a **higher resource and tool-intensive example**.

Highlights include:

- how a high degree of student support (office hours, questions and answer sessions) was organized and maintained;
- how early course surveys allowed for minor improvements as the course was running;
- how 'live' science was translated into remote learning;
- how authentic online peer review was incorporated into the course;
- testimonials from students; and
- recognition that this is a high resource, tool-intensive experience where many collaborators worked together.

Showcase 2021: Moving the Laboratory into a Virtual Classroom (Video length ~ 13 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#oembed-1

Transcript for Showcase 2021: Moving the Laboratory into a Virtual Classroom available on YouTube.

Credit: Dr. Cynthia Pruss, Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

Teaching intro archeology via storytelling and videos

In this example, Dr. Barbara Reeves, Queen's University, discusses how she converted her face-to-face course in introductory archaeological methods and techniques to an asynchronous online course. Using the proverb, "necessity is the mother of invention" she invented her own way to get over resource and time constraints. This is a **limited resource and tool-conservative example**.
Highlights include:

- creating "content storybooks" to support learning which included photos of graduate students and faculty 'in action in the field' so that students could imagine where they might be in a few years;
- releasing storybooks on a timed schedule to allow learners to focus deeply on a topic before moving on and to encourage active engagement with the course;
- how short, weekly assignments, weekly emails, and office hours increased engagement;
- videos created of the professor in the field (sometimes literally!) explaining course content and context;
- testimonials from students;
- how something as simple as a "punny" shirt or presence of a pet on course props can bring a lot of humor and enjoyment to students; and
- how she might re-adapt the material to bring it back to the physical classroom

Showcase 2021: Teaching Intro Archaeology via Storybooks and Videos (Video length ~ 11 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#oembed-2

Transcript for Showcase 2021: Teaching Intro Archaeology via Storybooks and Videos available on YouTube.

Credit: Dr. M. Barbara Reeves, Classics and Cultural Studies, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

Strategies in action: Making the most of synchronous delivery

When designing a new virtual course or redesigning a completely asynchronous course to include synchronous components, it can be difficult to visualize how this might be done for the most effective use of your and your learners' time.

Common approaches are to have weekly or bi-weekly synchronous sessions for the whole class to conduct learning and collaborative work together. Tasks and activities may change week-to-week, but the expectation is that unless it is an optional Q&A/exam-prep session, participation is mandatory.

However, there could be value for learners to meet synchronously with the whole, or part of, the class **just once or twice** at a critical point in the semester. Meeting to present a summative assignment or debrief to discuss complex ideas at key points in the semester might help reduce cognitive load, reinforce key concepts, and allow learners to share their learning with the class, while keeping the overall course structure flexible and potential access and accessibility issues low.

Students mastering content through synchronous presentations

In a fourth year undergraduate neuroscience course, Dr. Susan Boehnke organizes her students (under 80 students) into groups of three. Students are tasked to complete an in-depth critical analysis of a scientific paper and prepare a 15-minute synchronous group PowerPoint presentation. The presentation is done over video-conference software and is followed by a 20-minute Q&A session where each student in the group is required to individually answer several questions from the instructor to demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of the content of the presentation and related concepts from the core course materials. This is good practice for a future thesis defence, or other such oral examinations.

Highlights of this approach:

- **Flexibility**: students are randomly assigned partners based on how they rank which weeks they would prefer to present; this forces them to learn to work with others who are not always their choice.
- **High quality products**: being in a group for the presentation allows students to produce a more complex product compared to if they worked alone. 2 to 3 students is ideal for this assignment.
- **Targeted use of synchronous time**: students only meet synchronously once during the semester; the presentation dates are known at the beginning of the semester and once students are in their groups and they have ranked their preferred presentation dates, the instructor organizes a specific time on that date to present.
- **Balanced grade distribution, fairness, and reduced anxiety**: most of the student's grade is in the group mark; however, they must also be successful in individually answering questions in the live session. This can help high-performing students distinguish themselves from individuals who may have been carried by the group – a common source of anxiety and frustration from students.
- **Real time connection**: The students get to experience an almost one-on-one teaching and learning experience with the instructor, which is not very common in this type of learner's context. The students get instant feedback on their presentation and can learn how rigorous scientific questioning works (and prepares them for graduate school, if that is their chosen path).

Students generally love the assignment as it is academically challenging and allows them to delve deeply into the discipline in small groups, but also allows them to control a part of their own grade.

What instructors have to say:

"These presentations are the highlight of my teaching in this online course – I get to meet each of my students one-on-one and have a deep conversation with them about a neuroscience topic. Students can demonstrate their oral presentation skills, and the TA and I can model appropriate scientific discussion and debate. The oral examination component often provides us with great insight into the student's true knowledge and ability. Many students have reported that this is one of the most useful assignments of their undergraduate careers in terms of building real-world skills and increasing their confidence."

(Dr. Susan Boehnke, online instructor)

What instructors have to say:

"We have also found it possible to implement student accommodations for live presentations. For example, students with anxiety have provided pre-taped narrations for their slides, or they choose to have their video off during the presentation. One student even provided answers to their oral examination questions in real-time by typing their answers in the zoom chat function. In rare cases we simply allow some accommodated individuals to present alone if it is their preference, though typically their partners have been supportive and empathetic."

(Dr. Susan Boehnke, online instructor)

What learners have to say:

"Also, just wanted to thank for teaching this great course! Even with COVID and moving online, I felt like you and the TAs were all on top of things and cared about the success of the students. So thank you! Also, never get rid of the critical analysis assignment!! It was one of the most interesting assignments I've had to do, because I felt like it was really applicable to projects we would have to do in our life after graduation."

(Julie, online learner)

Credit: Dr. Susan Boehnke, Centre for Neuroscience Studies, Queen's Univerisity

Going deeper

If you are interested in exploring different activities for engagement and connection and how they could be implemented synchronously or asynchronously, the following resource from the Ontario College of Art and Design provides a quick overview of almost 40 activities with synchronous and asynchronous options.

- Engagement and Community-Building Activities – Synchronous and Asynchronous (PDF)

Reflect and apply: Are you making the most of the delivery formats?

Reflect on your prior experiences teaching (and/or learning) in virtual contexts to identify pain points (opportunities for growth) in your course so you can more easily identify strategies that will help improve your and your learners' experiences.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the question in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

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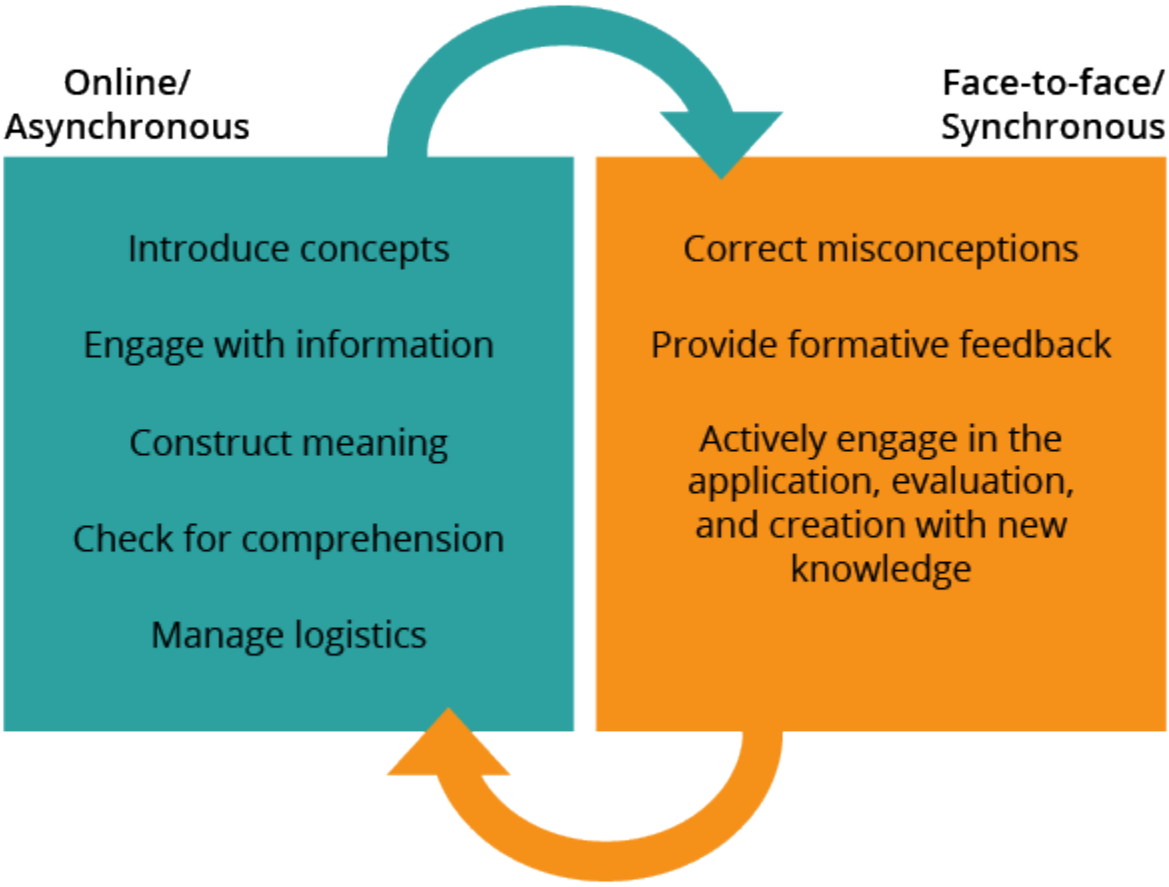
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=430#h5p-7

In conclusion, virtual courses have many affordances and challenges, but there remains lots of room to innovate, be creative, and be yourself with your students. If you are stuck in deciding how you might best use this method of teaching, viewing your course as a learning space that can be a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous could be helpful.

Consider the various course elements that are shown in the figure



The affordances of online/asynchronous delivery can be used to introduce concepts, get learners to engage with information, construct meaning, and instructors can use this format to assess comprehension, and manage logistics. Then your face-to-face/synchronous time with learners can be used to focus on correcting misconceptions, providing formative feedback, and actively engaging in the application, evaluation, and creation.
Credit: Lauren Anstey, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

Even if your course cannot have synchronous elements, think about how you can make the higher-order thinking elements of your course 'more human' and more caring. The next sections of the module will explore these ideas in more detail.

References and credits

The sections "*Virtual Learning Context*," "*Characteristics of Your Virtual Learners*," "*Challenges and Affordances of Virtual Learning*" are derived from original Fostering Engagement: Facilitating Online Courses in Higher Education, Unit 1. a by K.E. Wilson and D. Opperwall.

1.3 Setting the stage for significant and courageous learning

Key principles: Human learning

Human learning, in the human brain, is a social process, that is relational by nature and marked by attention to and observation of other humans and their behaviour. The processes involved in learning how to walk and speak is not fundamentally different from learning how to build a website or formulate a well-supported academic argument. We learn through **observation**, and **practice** when we have the **courage** to **engage**, put in **effort**, **make mistakes**, **fail**, and then **try again**. Teaching is achieved not just by telling, but by **showing**, **modeling**, and providing specific and timely **encouragement** and **constructive feedback**.

Asking learners to be open, to put in effort, and to change as a result of the learning they will do in your course is difficult work requiring a degree of vulnerability, and therefore courage. We'll look more closely at this in the next section in this module, where you'll also find resources from **Brené Brown** and her model for creating **daring classrooms**. Significant and **transformational learning** is grounded in **trust** and **transformational teaching** is an **act of caring**.

Human teaching and learning is a social process. We learn by observing and become motivated to engage when there is authentic interest (we care about what we are learning about) and we respect and or care about who we are learning from. Modeling is a critical aspect of teaching and the kind of encouragement and support that helps learners really transform are acts of caring. | Image Description (PDF) | © SolStock/E+/Getty Images; FG Trade/ E+/Getty Images; sutteerug/iStock/Getty Images; Chaay_Tee/ iStock/Getty Images (Copyrighted image. Do not copy, modify, or redistribute).

Reflect and apply: Reflection on transformational learning and courageous learning strategies

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

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Taxonomy of significant learning

One helpful framework for designing significant and transformational learning experiences is Fink's **Taxonomy of significant learning** (Fink, 2003). This taxonomy is rooted in the notion that learning involves **a change or transformation in the learner**. There are **six key dimensions** in the Taxonomy of Significant Learning that we can use to guide the design (setting course goals, learning outcomes, design of content and assessments of learning) of virtual courses.

Foundational knowledge

This dimension is essentially what many instructors think of first when describing their course or explaining what they teach. This includes the content, concepts, and information that you want your learners to grasp and involves operationalizing how you will assess foundational knowledge. As an area of learning assessment, foundational knowledge, is most commonly the focus of assessments, especially in introductory courses, but there are often other important goals instructors have for even their most novice students.

Application

This dimension is about taking earlier learning or knowledge and applying it in a new context or through

hands-on engagement and experimentation. This can include critical appraisal and evaluation, reflection, and expansive, creative, and/or practical thinking and problem-solving.

Integration

This dimension is all about making connections and the transfer of learning to new contexts. This can include connecting concepts across the course, different courses within a program or discipline, different disciplines, or to other aspects of one's life, profession, and society.

Human dimension

This dimension reflects learning about the self and others and relates to the kind of sense making, significance, and relevance realization that helps learners deeply connect and be transformed by learning. This dimension is grounded in the self and the social connections learners are able to make and grow.

Caring

This dimension reflects a shift in what learners care about and involves the development of learners' interests, motivations, values, and feelings and can translate into significant effort and the courage to do hard things.

Learning to learn

This dimension is about the process of learning to learn, developing the kind of metacognition and insight into one's own learning, and/or the discipline of study that enables learners to move towards more self-directed learning. This is the foundation for life-long learning.

Key principles: SMART learning outcomes for transformational learning

When designing or redesigning a virtual course it is helpful to start by **identifying your goals for learning in your course**—i.e., which dimensions of significant learning you expect your course to foster and your learners to achieve. Then identify **how you will assess** whether your learners have met these goals. You can then write the **course-level learning outcomes (LOs)**, which describe to students in clear and explicit terms what you expect them to learn and how they will be expected to demonstrate their learning.

Useful LOs take the guess work and interpretation that students need to do around vague words like 'understand' and 'know' by telling them how you and your discipline measure understanding and knowing. LOs are best phrased as actions (using verbs) and are SMART:

- **Specific**: clearly state what is to be done (action) that will be assessed
- **Measurable**: indicate how the outcome will be measured

- **Achievable**: realistic given the topic of the course, the stage or learning the learner is at, and time and resource constraints
- **Relevant**: aligns with the goals of the course/module
- **Time-bound**: clear and reasonable bounds on the time expected for the outcome to be demonstrated

The importance of LOs for course authors, instructors, & learners

Taking some time before you design and develop your course to think through and articulate your LOs can help you make important and time-saving decisions about **what content to include**, **how to present that content**, and **designing assessments that really measure the learning that matters**. The importance of making this plan is analogous to planning a road trip:

- the significant learning goals (your learners' destination)
- a plan for how you will help learners achieve those goals (the route to get to the destination)
- a way of checking that they achieved the goals (ways of assessing that they arrived at the intended destination)

A course without a clear destination, route, and/or a way of knowing whether one has arrived can make course design decisions particularly difficult and inefficient. Knowing where you want learners to end up and how you will know they got there will help you to work efficiently in

- selecting the topics you will teach (what is essential vs. what is enrichment or supplementary),
- how you will teach them (what methods will transmit the content and enable them to transform that into significant learning), and
- the assessments you need to evaluate whether learners met these goals of significant learning.

Sharing these LOs with students is essentially like giving them the road map to the course and ensures that all of this is **transparent**. Helping learners understand what is important to you and the goals of the course helps them to manage their time, focus on what is important and relevant, self-assess their own learning, and prepare for assessment.

Creating SMART LOs using significant learning verbs

Let's take a closer look at each of the dimensions of significant learning and learning outcome verbs commonly associated with each.

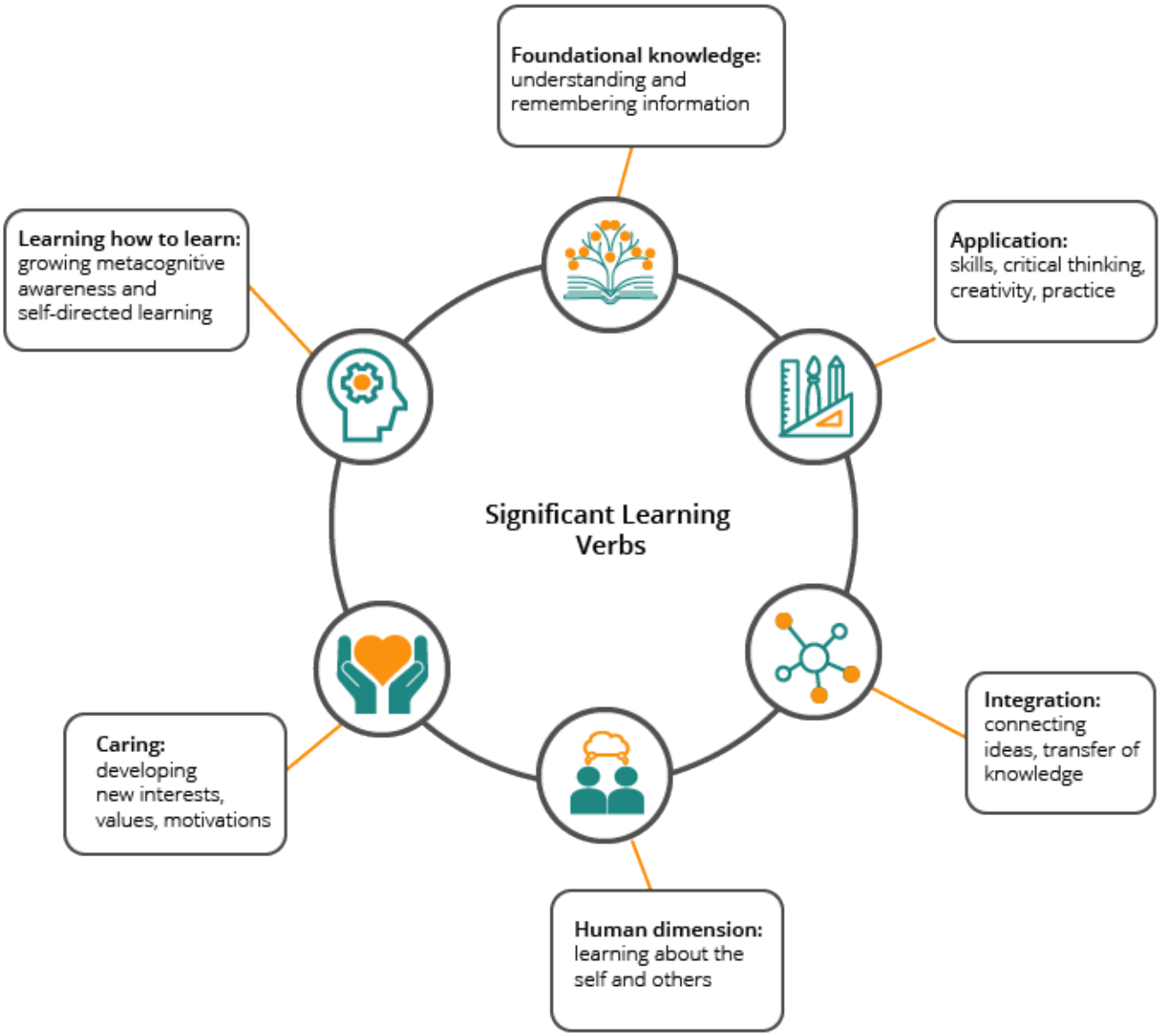

Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

Table. Fink's six dimensions of significant learning and measurable learning outcomes.

DIMENSION OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING	LEARNING OUTCOMES
FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE	• Define • Describe • Name • Explain
	• Recognize • Recall • Identify • Illustrate
APPLICATION	• Critique • Appraise • Calculate • Judge
	• Apply • Decide • Provide examples • Relate
INTEGRATION	• Compare • Contrast • Integrate • Relate
	• Combine • Draw connections between • Reflect • Identify similarities/differences
HUMAN DIMENSION	• Discuss • Debate • Collaborate • Reflect • Advocate
	• Empathize • Relate • Negotiate • Mediate • Resolve
CARING	• Incorporate • Value • Commit • Share
	• Reflect • Prioritize • Decide • Articulate why ‘x’ matters

DIMENSION OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING	LEARNING OUTCOMES
LEARNING TO LEARN	• Construct • Design your learning path • Find resources • Figure out • Identify goals • Identify areas for improvement • Describe strategies that help you learn

Going deeper

To learn more about Fink's Taxonomy of Significant learning

- Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences*. Jossey Bass.

The following resource provides an account of how a developmental psychologist applied Fink's Taxonomy and redesigned her courses (as did 5 of her colleagues) and the results of her pre-post study that showed significant improvement in learning

- Using Fink's Taxonomy in Course Design

For more information on developing significant learning outcomes and a list of more useful verbs see the following resources

- Fink's Significant Learning Outcomes
- Fink's Significant Learning Outcome Verbs

For more information on taking a nonhierarchical and EDDI approach to developing SMART LOs, visit the following interactive tool. You'll be able to see examples there and export your initial ideas for creating new learning outcomes using this holistic framework.

- Incorporating a Holistic Framework in Online Curriculum Development

For further learning on how to appropriately consider this framework, refer to Module 2.6 The Road to Decolonizing and Indigenizing a Virtual Course.

Key principles: Three types of connection for significant learning

In translating Fink's dimensions of Significant Learning to the virtual context, it is important to think about how learners will interact with you, the content and skills training, and their peers, as these **three basic forms of connection** are critical to humanizing learning. Think about it this way:

- Fink's Taxonomy is helpful for identifying the key goals/learning outcomes that matter to you, your discipline and/or program and
- the three types of connection/interaction are how (what we do) to achieve those goals in a virtual course.

Michael G. Moore (1989) highlighted these three essential types of connection or interactions that are important for learners to succeed in a given course, especially one taken at a distance.

The three basic forms of connection are:

Credit: “student” icon by The Icon Z and “instructor” icon by Ed Gray, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Learner–instructor: These interactions include not only the various ways that learners connect, communicate with, and receive feedback from instructors, but also the many ways in which instructor presence can be seen and felt throughout a virtual course. Good learner–instructor interactions can help set the tone for learner engagement and create space for courageous and meaningful learning.

Credit: “student” icon by The Icon Z and “content” icon by Shakeel Ch., from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Learner–content: These interactions include all the different ways learners can interact with and connect with content. Good learner–content interactions help learners feel motivated and engaged.

Credit: “student” icon by The Icon Z, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Learner–learner: these interactions include the many ways in which learners connect with, communicate with,

and learn from their peers. Peer-to-peer learning is a powerful tool when used appropriately and can foster a learning community and relationships that extend past the last day of class.

Moore's **interactions** are the discreet spheres or spaces in which opportunities for **authentic engagement** and **significant learning** can be found. We can think of these three forms of interaction as the touchpoints, points of connection, transmission, and interaction through which significant virtual learning occurs. We will elaborate on these modes of connection (both in the design and delivery of virtual courses), providing strategies and examples of the many ways you can create opportunities for these connection points in virtual courses and how they can be used to foster significant learning across the six dimensions.

Strategies in action: Alignment tables

Alignment tables are useful for creating a map to your virtual course and will set the direction of your approach to course design and delivery, including

- your course goals (prioritized dimensions of significant learning),
- learning outcomes,
- assessments, and
- identifying the modes of interaction and connection that will enable the transfer of knowledge and learning (learner–instructor, learner–learner, learner–content).

The following are example alignment tables from a range of courses.

- English Literature course (Waterloo)
- Intro to Stats course (Waterloo)
- Psychology – Basic Processes of Behaviour (Conestoga)
- Capstone II – Organizational Consulting Project (Conestoga)

Reflect and apply: Aligning learning outcomes, assessments, and connection

(Re)create alignment tables for your own course by

- reflecting on the **significant learning goals** that are most important to you and/or required by the department/program (maybe make a prioritized list);
- brainstorming how you might **assess** whether your learners are meeting these goals;
- writing **learning outcomes** that **use verbs** that describe how each dimension/goal will be assessed or how learners will be asked to demonstrate the achievement of that goal; and
- identifying whether your assessments rely on or involve all **three forms of connection/interaction** (learner–instructor, learner–learner, learner–content). Assessments most commonly focus on learner-content interaction. Can you find opportunities to build all three forms of connection into this course plan that will help enrich the significant learning you have planned through interactions with you, TAs, and their peers?

Note: Throughout this course we encourage you to come back to this table and adjust and modify if you come across a new strategy that helps you create opportunities for all three forms of connection and/or richer connections.

Remember that you can work in this page or offline in a Word document by going to the last item on this list "**Export"** to download the questions and your answers. Alternatively, if you prefer to work in a table format, we have included downloadable **templated alignment tables** at the bottom of this interaction.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Complete the alignment chart by typing your details in the boxes below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=432#h5p-14

Templated alignment tables

Course-Level (DOCX)

Module-Level (DOCX)

References and credits

Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences.* Jossey Bass.

Moore, M. G. (1989). Three types of interaction. *The American Journal of Distance Education, 3*(2), 1–6.

1.4 Learner–instructor connection: Designing courses with personality

Key principles: The importance of presence and humanizing yourself

Online classes are not meant to be like your favorite slow-cooker recipe. They are not "set and forget." It's impossible to foster meaningful relationships with that approach.

(Darby & Lang, 2019, p. 87)

Darby left (Darby, n.d.) & Lang right (Lang, n.d.)

"student" icon by The Icon Z and "instructor" icon by Ed Gray, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Many of the skills you have developed through teaching face-to-face apply in the virtual learning context as well. However, relative to an in-person course, you may need to put in a little more thought, effort, intention, and planning to find ways to close the transactional distance that is inherent online. Spending some time to think carefully about how you will "show up" for your learners in your virtual course is probably one of the most important things you can do. In fact, research shows that the most significant factor in predicting learner success in virtual courses is the **instructor presence** and **interpersonal interactions** (Xu & Smith, 2013; Jaggars & Xu, 2016). How you show up in term plays a huge role in bringing your course to life and showing learners that there is a real person who is present and cares about their learning. We will discuss high-impact strategies for fostering and growing your instructor presence in a later module on learner-instructor interaction.

Instructor presence, however, should not be an afterthought or something that you do only after your course is designed and developed. It can be woven throughout the design of your virtual course so that students never feel totally alone in their learning and have an ongoing sense of your instructional presence, guiding them even when you (or another course instructor) are not immediately there with them. For instance, the feeling of presence can come through in how you instruct and guide students through assessments, how you design and present the course content, and in how you plan for and build in learner support.

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Quick tips and tricks: Quality not quantity

Building in meaningful opportunities for interaction and connection with your learners does not have to be terribly time consuming. Research shows that it's not the **quantity** of interactions with students that predicts learner success, but rather the **quality** of those interactions. Some simple ways to build in quality/meaningful support for your learners include,

- swapping out long synchronous sessions for **short check-ins** or **Q and A sessions with a defined topic**—more time on camera does not equal stronger connections; keep session short and specific, so learners know what they are showing up for (see the additional reading on synchronous sessions in the **Going deeper** section below);
- **consider having students submit questions prior to live sessions, allowing you to address areas of concern**, or organize sessions strategically around important course milestones (e.g., an upcoming assignment, ahead of a midterm or debriefing after it, etc.);
- **prescheduling weekly reminders** can help keep learners on track (both in the content they need to review and assessments they need to complete) and give them the sense that you are paying attention—these can be set up ahead of time in most learning management systems (LMSs) by scheduling the date and time of announcements (**Hint**: schedule announcements to appear at different times of the day, so they don't feel too automated to students), and/or
- **providing learners with whole-class feedback on assessments**—if time constraints or class size prevents you from being able to provide individualized feedback, send out an announcement (text or video) that summarizes what learners generally did well and struggled with and how they can improve for the next assessment. Consider posting an A+ assessment (with the learner's permission and anonymized) that can help learners see how to modify their own approach next time.

Going deeper

The following articles provide primary research evidence of the significant impact instructor presence has on learner outcomes in virtual courses.

- Jaggars, S., & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance? *Computers & Education*, *95*, 270–284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.01.014
- Xu, D., & Smith, S. (2013, February). Adaptability to online learning: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas. *Teacher's College, Columbia University*. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Adaptability+to+online+learning%3a+Differences+across+types+of+&id=ED539911

The following is an article that provides some guidance on how to integrate live synchronous sessions into an asynchronous course.

- Lowenthal, P., Dunlap, J., & Snelson, C. (2017). Live synchronous web meetings in asynchronous online courses: Reconceptualizing virtual office hours. *Online Learning, 21*(4), 177–194. http://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i4.1285

Let them "see" you

Your learners are interested in you and the more you can help them get to know you as an individual, the more connected they tend to become to the content, motivated to work hard, and less likely to commit academic integrity violations. There are many ways for your personality to come through in your course, which does not require you to go on camera, if that is not something you are comfortable with.

That does not mean you need to share all the details of your life and you do not need to try to be something or someone you are not. You do not need to try to be funny if you are naturally more serious nor do you need to be especially buttoned-up if that's not who you are. We are all different, have **different teaching personas**, and have different levels of comfort around sharing about ourselves, but that shouldn't keep you from being seen by your students.

One of the benefits to asynchronous virtual learning, is that you get to carefully craft how you introduce yourself, how you present yourself, and what you share about yourself. The key is to be authentic and find the sweet spot that feels right for you, between friendly familiarity (too far in this direction can impact credibility and professionalism), and academic professionalism (too far this way may keep you feeling far away and unrelatable).

Find the balance between friendly familiarity and academic professionalism that feels comfortable and authentic to you. If you tend to land way over in one end of the spectrum, consider growing your boundaries a little, to find that sweet spot in the middle that helps to reduce psychological distance between you and your students (makes you more relatable), while remaining professional and credible.
Credit: University of Waterloo

What instructors have to say:

"Being personable does not mean you need to get personal."
(Prof. James Skidmore, online instructor)

If you want to keep your sharing to the realm of your professional life, that is great, but don't let that stop you from sharing with your learners what you are passionate about, what drives you in your field, where you may have encountered challenges in your academic or professional life, and how you overcame those challenges. Remember enthusiasm is infectious!

What learners have to say:

"I like the personalization myself … [it] takes away a lot of those "barriers" we get in online courses with our instructors. Puts a person to the name. And those personalities! So much passion for what they do … it's clear, and motivating. You don't want to disappoint them."
(Julie, online learner)

Key principles: Vulnerability and encouraging courageous learning

Asking your learners to be open to learning, allowing themselves to be changed, and to truly connect requires **courage**, because let's face it, **real and deep learning is hard**. Learning is effortful, we risk making mistakes or failing, we bump up against our limitations, and need to persevere through those uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty and confusion in order to get to those beautiful 'ah-ha' moments. For many of us (and your learners), prior life experiences, inside and outside the classroom, have taught us that really trying and learning can hurt, especially if learning (and the inevitable mistakes and failures that go along with learning) was ever met with shaming. **Shaming is particularly harmful when it comes from someone who had/has power over us**, such a parent, boss, or teacher.

Recognizing your power: To help or to harm

As an instructor, your relationship with learners includes an inherent **power differential**, which can make it especially scary for learners to be open and vulnerable, to reach outside their comfort zone, and really learn. If you want your learners to really show up for your course, whatever that looks like (e.g., engaging in an online discussion or turning on their camera in a synchronous session), it is important to look at how the design of your course, assessments, and how you set up and model interactions with your learners can either

- reinforce feelings of insecurity and shame learners may have around learning or
- give learners the courage, encouragement, and confidence to put in the kind of effort that may make them feel vulnerable, but also make transformational learning possible.

We highly recommend the following resource and the linked video, in particular, as a means of deepening your understanding of the power you hold as an instructor and how you might encourage your learners to really "show up" and how you "show up" for your learners can inspire the kind of courageous and transformation learning that contribute to rewarding teaching and learning.

Going deeper

If you would like to learn more about vulnerability and inspiring courageous learning in your students consider the following resource link and fantastic video from **Brené Brown.** Brené Brown is an inspiring speaker, instructor, social worker, and researcher the following resources draw on her work on brave and daring leadership and strategies for applying this to the classroom. While some of the resources on this website are targeted at primary and secondary school educators, much of this applies to post-secondary education.

- Brené Brown: Building Brave Spaces for Students

If you have about 30 mins, we highly recommend the following talk by **Brené Brown** where she discusses the role of vulnerability and courage in learning and the **profoundly important role teachers and instructors play in helping or hurting learners**.
Brené Brown | Daring Classrooms | SXSWedu 2017 (Video length ~ 34 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=434#oembed-1

Transcript for Brené Brown | Daring Classrooms | SXSWedu 2017 available on YouTube.

Strategies in action: Introducing yourself, the course, and welcoming learners

One of the first things we tend to do when we are teaching in the classroom is to **welcome learners to the class and help them get oriented**. This is just as important (perhaps even more so) in the virtual classroom and is a very important element in setting the overall tone for the whole course. Some strategies include creating a welcome announcement, video, or page in your course ahead of time that helps learners get oriented as soon as they arrive in the course. We'll discuss this more in the later module on **Facilitating Connection**, where we will focus on teaching strategies in term, when the course is live.

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–instructor, learner–content;
- **significant learning (modelling)**: application, integration, caring, and human connection; and
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large-class, small-class, novice-learners, advanced-learners)

Welcome announcements and videos

Inviting students into the course at the outset can be done by posting a text-based announcement and/or a welcome video. These can be created ahead of time, but they are often executed right at the start of term by the

instructor or course facilitator. For this reason, we cover these strategies and examples in **Module 3 Facilitating for Connection** in the section called "Instructor Presence During Term."

Liquid syllabus

A liquid syllabus is another way of providing learners with an orientation to the course, one that is hosted on a public, accessible, mobile-friendly website rather than in an LMS.

The following resource is a quick and helpful overview of what a liquid syllabus is:

Michelle Pacansky-Brock: Liquid Syllabus – An Overview

Here is a link to an example liquid syllabus:

Liquid Syllabus: History of Still Photo

Even if you are not in a position to create a stand-alone site such as this, you may be inspired by the sections of Michelle Pecansky-Brock's liquid syllabus and maybe be able to create a version of this in your LMS:

- Welcome
- My commitment to you
- How this course works
- My teaching philosophy
- Our pact
- Equity statement
- Week 1 success kit
- Michelle's six tips for success
- How to get your questions answered

Strategies in action: Providing learners with your professional perspective

Share interesting details on **how your research/work connects to course topics**, tips on how to work effectively or **how you have overcome challenges** when you were first learning the discipline, and/or share **commentary on emerging trends** (discipline-specific or lay-media) and how you interpret them through

- prerecorded videos,
- discussion boards,
- announcements, or
- live sessions.

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–instructor, learner–content;
- **significant learning (modelling)**: application, integration, caring, and human connection; and
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Your learners DO want to hear what you have to say, and not just read the literature! If you work 'out in the field', consider filming an interesting workplace or professional experience using your smartphone (ensure to seek permission before filming). This could be the lab, the office, or outside in urban or rural environments.

Quick tips and tricks: Videos that are not perfect, but are human

If you are creating videos, they do not need to be polished, just grab your smart phone and start recording. Often these short impromptu videos feel more authentic and personable—more human than a high production video.

The following video is longer and more elaborate than the short videos we are talking about in this section, but the beginning of this video helps to illustrate how real and engaging a lower quality recording can be. It's not perfect, the camera is a little wobbly, the instructor recording is speaking to the person doing the demo and laughs, which can help the viewer feel more connected and like they are watching real people. Then the instructor turns the camera on himself and talks right to you.

Can Silence Actually Drive You Crazy? (Watch 0:00 – 0:45, video length ~11 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=434#oembed-2

Transcript for Can Silence Actually Drive You Crazy? available on YouTube.

Strategies in action: Modelling and Inspiring connections with your learners

The following strategies help to set the tone for learners through modelling and gives them a chance to show up and share a bit about themselves. This helps your learners build their own personal connection to course topics and their peers and will help you get to know your learners and feel more connected to them.

These following strategies foster

- **Connection**: Learner–instructor, learner-learner, learner-content
- **Significant learning**: Foundational knowledge, Application, Integration, Learning to Learn, Caring, and Human Connection
- **Context**: All (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Digital stories

Sharing with learners why you are interested in a topic and/or showing them how topics relate to personally relevant or real-world issues can really help spark their own interest and connection with you, each other, and content. Digital stories is a strategy that starts with the instructor creating a short video that highlights a personal or real-world connection to a course topic and then inviting learners to create their own digital story. These can be shared in the class by posting them in a discussion forum in your LMS. Keep this activity low-stakes (not heavily graded), to take some of the pressure to perform off and allow students to really explore and be creative!

Digital Stories (2 videos ~ 6 mins total with templates and rubrics)

Show rather than tell: Examples, demonstrations, and clarifying expectations

Providing learners with **explicit instructions** is often not sufficient for them to really understand the nuances of many academic and discipline-specific skills, such as academic writing, discourse, debate, or critical thinking. Providing learners with **applied examples** is an important way to model these critical or more nuanced skills which many learners struggle with.

When we simply tell learners to write a paper or consider questions and post to an online discussion, we are assuming that learners already know how to engage in this type of academic behaviour. However, even learners in higher-level courses struggle with these skills, and some have never had the opportunity to try it out, get feedback on, or observe well-executed examples. Modelling is critical for all those academic behaviours and learning outcomes that really go beyond fact memorization. Below are a couple of strategies that can make a huge difference in the quality of learner-learner interactions and performance on assessments.

Assessment expectations

Provide learners with **examples of exemplar assessments** (e.g., writing samples, efficient code, or effective ways of solving a problem in your discipline) before learners start to work through their assessments. **Annotating an example** of a learner assessment, highlighting what the learner did, why it worked, or how it could be improved, helps to model the kind of self-monitoring and metacognition that is required for evaluating one's own work. Learners often get this feedback and modelling when it's too late to impact their performance in the course (e.g., a final paper).

Discussion forum expectations

If your course has a discussion forum, but there is little guidance around how learners should interact, write out some guidelines around learner conduct in online discussions:

- Provide some examples of what a meaningful discussion contribution would look like.
- Outline the importance of professional academic discourse (explain what this means) and use of respectful language.
- What are the consequences if someone violates these guidelines?
- Provide some online discussion tips for students.

Pop into your learners' online discussions, providing occasional comments that help move discussions forward and modelling academic discourse and the types of skills you hope learners will develop (e.g., productive debate, critical thinking, and problem-solving).

Going deeper

The following is a resource that provides some good examples of discussion protocols and designing seminar courses:

- Remote Teaching: Seminars and Discussion-Based Courses

- Online Discussion Tips for Students

See one, do one, teach one

When designing your assessments, you might consider the see one, do one, teach one model, where

- **you demonstrate** a skill or you provide **examples** of either your own work or the work of other learners (with their permission);
- **learners experiment and try themselves** and possibly submit an example of their work as a low-stakes assessment for feedback; and
- **learners teach that skill or information to other learners**, as either a whole class activity or in smaller groups. This could be done in short video presentations or could be done through a discussion forum, where learners take the lead in facilitating on online discussion forum (if the class is large, break learners into smaller groups of about 5–10 learners).

Quick tips and tricks: Accessing institutional supports

Explore what **central institutional resources** are available to you and your learners at your institution to help your learners **build soft skills**. Some **academic and student support units** may be available to run a custom live or recorded webinar for the needs of the course. This can be an interesting way to teach soft skills with little additional resources but big impact.

- Does your institution have a **writing centre** that can provide a workshop?
- Does your institution have a **librarian** who can provide guidance on how to conduct research for large project/paper in your discipline?
- Does your institution have an **accessibility services** representative who can talk about design considerations for your course to help ensure your course is accessible?
- Does your institution have a **student success office** or **wellness centre** that has resource you can share with your students to get them started on the right foot and know where to go if they need help that goes beyond your course?

Strategies in action: Creating opportunities for feedback on learning

When planning your course it is important to think through how learners will get support and guidance on their learning. How will they know if they are on the right track and how can they get support from you and/or teaching assistants?

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–instructor, learner–content
- **significant learning**: learning to learn
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Guidance on providing learner support

The most important factor for giving learners a sense of being supported is demonstrating how and when they can get help when they need it. It is important that support/help is

- **accessible to all learners**: This means not just being available at one time or through a single modality, such as video conferencing. Try to make yourself **available through a variety of channels**, such as email, discussion forums, and online office hours;
- **timely**: The recommendation is email responses within **24 hours, Monday to Friday**. You may have a different time frame or there may be days where you won't be able to respond to learners. If so, make sure that those days or times when you are less available are clear to learners so they can plan around your schedule. Keep in mind that many learners do their learning at night and/or on the weekend and may be in different time zones; and
- **setting clear policies and expectations**: Ensure you clearly communicate all course assignment deadlines (and significant milestones), turnaround time on receiving feedback/grades, and a clear and rationalized late policy. This way learners can plan their whole semester from day one according to their other responsibilities and know what to do if they run into problems. This helps build mutual respect and accountability for the upcoming learning journey which may inevitably have bumps and challenges along the way.

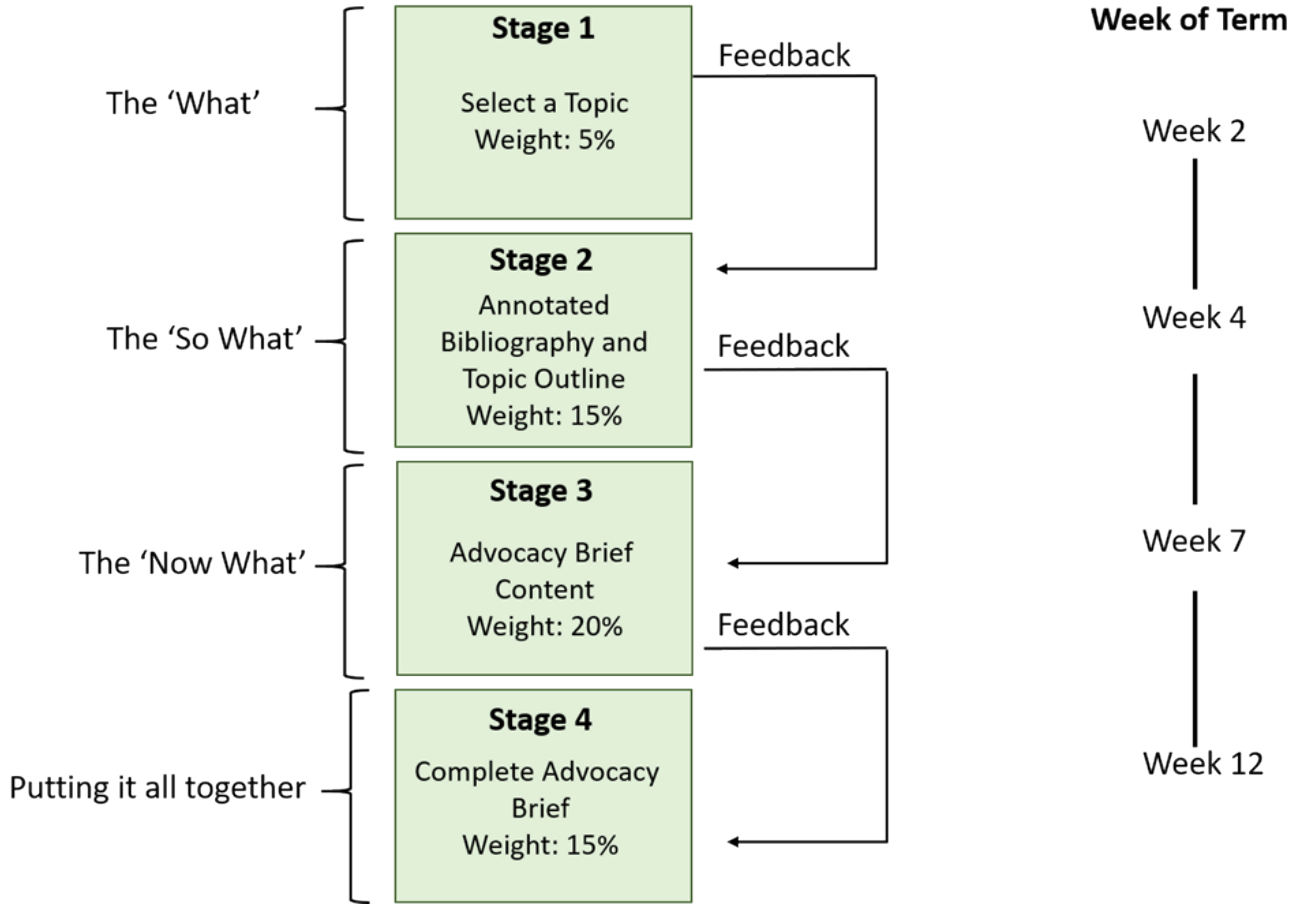
I will typically grade and return assignments within seven (7) days of the due date. If this changes due to unusual circumstances, I'll communicate that as needed.
(Darby & Lang, 2019, p. 89)

Scaffolded assignments

Scaffolded assessments, paired with timely feedback, is a great way to guide your learners through larger assessments and the development of new skills. Breaking assessments down into smaller pieces and/or giving learners the opportunity to try out a new skill or application in a lower-stakes context (i.e., not heavily weighted) can eliminate some of the anxiety learners may have about assessments, help them feel safe to really try out a new skill, and gives them the feedback they need to understand your expectations and how they will be assessed in higher-stakes assessments.

One earth, one health: Advocacy brief assessment

In the following example, the term assignment is scaffolded over Weeks 2 to 12 with four stages. Each stage of the assignment includes a student submission for evaluation as well as feedback from the instructor. This scaffolded approach to this assignment provides opportunities for students to develop skills in analysis and comprehension of course material, but also to respond and apply feedback to subsequent stages of the assignment. The first three stages and the provided feedback are collectively applied to the final submission of a complete advocacy brief in Stage 4.



Term Assignment Road Map demonstrates the movement of students through the four stages of the assignment in relation to the weekly timeline in the course. Following Stages 1-3, students are provided feedback which are applied to subsequent stages. Image Description [PDF] | Credit: Jennifer Marshman, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University

Assignment: A climate change plan for a real-world community

For this Geography and Environmental Management group assignment students prepare a climate change plan for a real-world community that does not yet have a plan in place through a scaffolded process.

Stages include

- team contract,
- selection of case study community,
- outline of proposal and references,
- proposal and references, and
- presentation and discussion.

Climate Change Plan Assignment Example (PDF)

Credit: Dr Mark Seasons, School of Planning, University of Waterloo

Rubrics

Designing grading rubrics for each of your assessments is one of the most important strategies for communicating to learners what your expectations are and transparency around how they will be assessed.

Philosophy – Critical thinking: Personal reflection assignment rubric

This rubric is for an assignment on a personal reflection on fallacies and asks students to reflect on two situations where they used faulty reasoning. They are asked to address five points:

- Describe a situation where you have used a fallacy.
- Identify the fallacy that you used.
- Explain why this is an example of that fallacy.
- Correct your reasoning.
- Include reasonable strategies for avoiding this fallacy in the future.

Philosophy Rubric Example (PDF)
Credit: Shannon Buckley, General Arts and Science, Interdisciplinary Studies, Conestoga College

Going deeper

If you are interested in learning more about designing really useful rubrics, the **VALUE Rubrics** is a great resource for creating rubrics that assess intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning. You will want to ensure that your rubrics are well **aligned with the significant learning goals of the course**, the **LOs you shared with learners**, and of course the **expectations you outline in the assignment instructions**.

- VALUE Rubrics

Strategies in action: Seeking learner feedback

It is not uncommon for virtual course instructors to feel separated and distant from their students, missing the kind of real-time feedback they get from in-person teaching. There are some strategies that can be really helpful for getting some of that feedback from your learners so you know who they are, where they are at in their learning, and what they may want and need from you.

These following strategies foster

- **connection**: Learner–instructor
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Getting to know your learners with surveys

Surveys and polls can be a quick and easy way to get a sense of who is in your course. Recall in a previous activity, **Reflect and Apply: Getting to Know your Learners**, we included some questions about who your learners are, which might be helpful as a starting place for creating your own survey questions to get to know students. Below are some more examples and guidance.

Personally identified surveys

Nonanonymous surveys can be helpful to get to know individuals and can be very useful for sorting learners into intentional groups. You may choose to assign groups based on different factors, but one of the most helpful ways to group is by location/time zone, as this will make working in teams much easier.

Anonymous surveys

Anonymous surveys can be helpful in collecting more personal and honest information from learners without requiring them to self-disclose their identities or be concerned that they will be singled out, judged, or evaluated for what they have shared. This will give you an overview of who is in the class and the diversity of perspectives and goals.

Here is an example survey you might use as a starting place, from Michelle Pacanksey-Brock: Getting to Know You Survey

Closing the loop: Sharing survey results

Learners often enjoy and benefit from seeing how their classmates responded to surveys and seeing the diversity in the class. Consider sharing anonymous aggregate results from the introduction survey as a course announcement. This also helps to close the communication loop, shows your learners that you have done something constructive with the information they shared, and provides learners with something in return for the time they spent filling out the survey.

Teaching 3-2-1

Get feedback from learners on their learning and foster learner reflection. An excellent way to foster learner reflection and to receive feedback from learners on their learning progress and potential bottlenecks. Learners write about

- three (3) things they learned in the week's content;
- two (2) things they found particularly interesting, and
- one (1) question they need clarifying.

3-2-1 (two videos ~ 5 mins total with templates and rubrics)

Reflect and apply: Creating the conditions for courageous learning

Identify a couple of strategies you can apply to help create a safe environment in your virtual course that encourages learners to be open, to make mistakes, and engage in courageous learning.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=434#h5p-15*

Going deeper

You can find more on humanizing learning from Michelle Pacansky-Brock at the following links:

- Teaching in the Era of Bots: Students Need Humans Now More Than Ever
- Humanizing – Michelle Pacansky-Brock

References and credits

Darby, F., & Lang, J. M. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes*. John Wiley & Sons.

Jaggars, S. & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance? *Computers & Education, 95*, 270–284.

Xu, D., & Smith, S. (2013). *Adaptability to online learning: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas*. Teacher's College, Columbia University. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Adaptability+to+online+learning%3a+Differences+across+types+of+&id=ED539911

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1.5 Learner–content connection: Designing valuable learning experiences

Key principles: Course content design for humans

Content is at the heart of learning. Learners come to postsecondary institutions to discover new information, identify important problems and their solutions, encounter new ideas, and learn new processes. In short, engaging with content is nearly always a learner's primary goal.

Learners interact with content any time they encounter a new fact, idea, theory, or principle presented to them by another person in a course, whether by reading, watching, listening, or viewing something. In his seminal work on interaction in distance education, Michael Moore (1989) locates learner–content interaction at the heart of all learning experiences.

Credit: "student" icon by The Icon Z and "content" icon by Shakeel Ch., from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

> Without [learner–content interaction] there cannot be education, since it is the process of intellectually interacting with content that results in changes in the learner's understanding, the learner's perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner's mind.
>
> Moore (1989)

Identifying learner–content interactions

Let's begin by thinking about the types of learner–content interaction that will take place in your virtual course. Not all virtual courses deliver content in the same way, and most courses use a variety of methods for content delivery. Some common learner-content interactions for virtual courses include:

- Assigned readings (textbooks, articles, primary sources, etc.);
- Written lecture materials or transcripts of lectures;
- Illustrative images;
- Charts and graphs (often static, but may be animated);
- Video or audio lectures;
- Narrated PowerPoint presentations;
- Embedded or linked multimedia content (such as films, YouTube videos, podcasts, etc.);
- Links to popular media, current news events, or blogs;
- Research assignments (in which learners curate content themselves); and
- Content sharing between learners (such as in a discussion, class wiki, or group project).

The key to designing virtual learning materials and virtual course content in a way that really engages students and fosters those connections that lead to significant learning is to **understand how humans engage with virtual materials**, what helps them and guides them into these materials, and what hinders them and pushes them away. In other words, virtual content and activities will be most effective if they are grounded in knowledge of how humans function in online contexts, how they learn, **what motivates learners** to really

engage, and **what frustrates learners** and leads them to shut them down. We can turn to two key areas in human research to ground our design strategies in evidence:

1. **User experience (UX) research** tells us how humans interact with web interfaces.
2. **Human psychological research** tells us how humans attend to and process information, remember information, and learn.

A framework developed by the Centre for Extended Learning at the University of Waterloo provides guidance on how to create quality learning materials that foster learner-content connection and significant learning.

Building learner–content connection is grounded in human emotion. Authentic learner-content connection is built by tapping into learner motivation, reward, and interest, building credibility, enhancing access, and creating experiences that are intuitive to navigate and do not lead to frustration.

Key principles: Creating valuable learner–content interactions

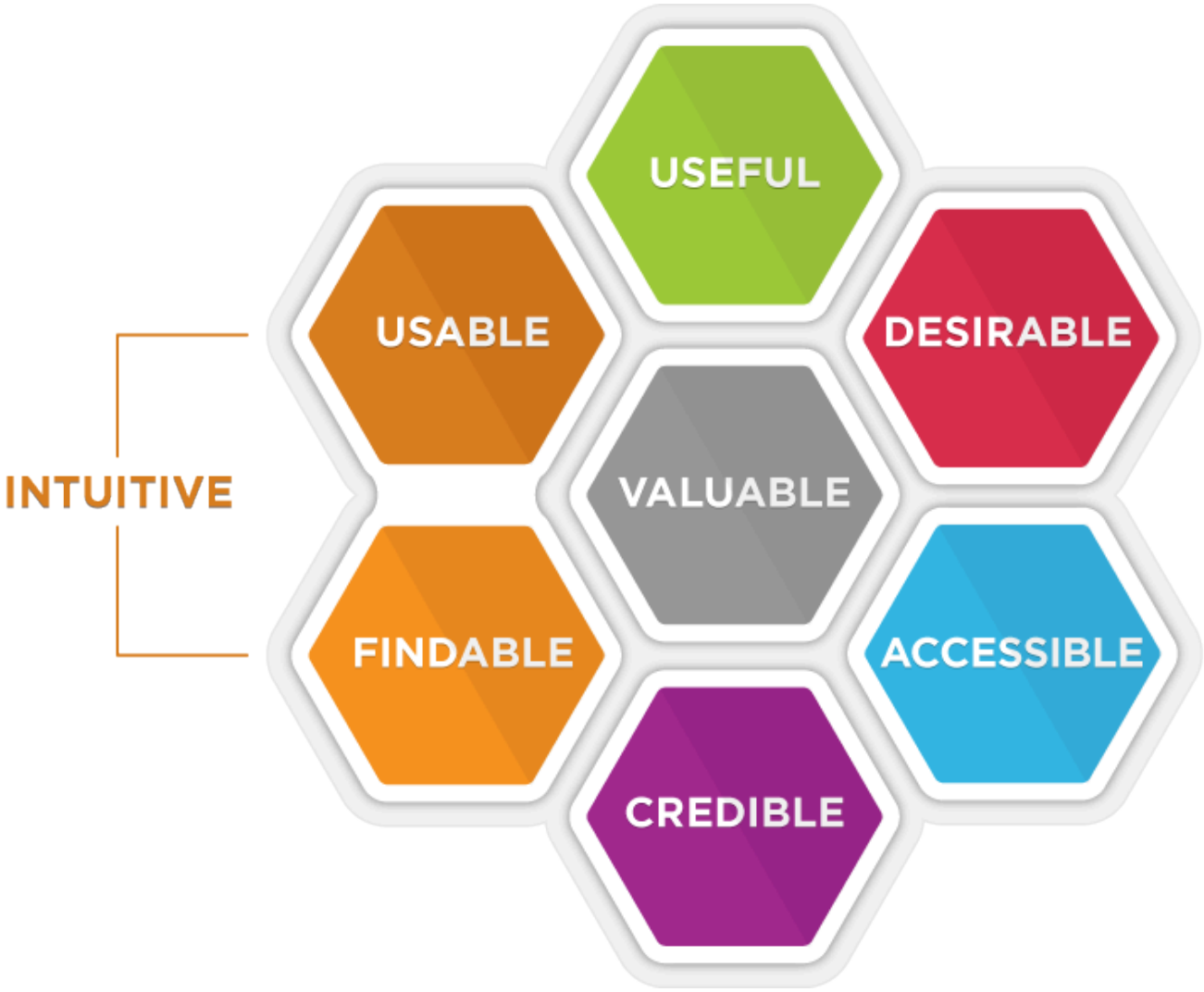
The User Experience Design for Learning (UXDL) Honeycomb is a framework that provides a great foundation in key principles of virtual content and activities design. This framework was adapted, with permission, from Peter Morville's UX Honeycomb. The UX Honeycomb provides principles of UX design for the web and the UXDL adapts this framework to the context of learning online, grounding each principle in psychological research on human information processing, memory, and learning.

Since I created the User Experience Honeycomb in 2004, it has been adopted and adapted by people and organizations all over the world. But the [UXDL] framework that CEL has developed for creating valuable online learning experiences is my favorite application yet.

Peter Morville, UXDL Honeycomb

Peter Morville (Semantic Studios, 2021)

Each cell of the UXDL framework provides specific and practical guidance for post-secondary educators who want to create virtual learning experiences **that take their learners and the medium of virtual learning into consideration**, creating **Desirable**, **Useful**, **Accessible**, **Credible**, and **Intuitive** (**Findable** and **Usable**) learning experiences. Each of these principles are aligned with how humans learn and process information, helping to leverage the affordance of the virtual environment and mitigate limitations.



The UXDL Framework provides guidance to post-secondary educators who want to design valuable learning experiences and create content that learners can really connect with. There are 6 cells in the honeycomb that provide guidance on how to create Valuable learning experiences that are: Useful, Desirable, Accessible, Credible, Findable, and Usable for learners. Credit: University of Waterloo, UXDL Honeycomb. Adapted with permission from Peter Morville.

Going deeper

The UXDL framework has been validated with undergraduate learners at the University of Waterloo in a research study that included 800 survey participants and over 100 hrs of user experience testing sessions using courses across the disciplines (arts and humanities, social science, and STEM courses). The research reveals that learners value online learning experiences that are aligned with the UXDL framework. To learn more about what learners have to say you can read this primary research:

- Troop, M., White, D., Wilson, K.E., & Zeni, P. (2020). The user experience design for learning (UXDL) framework: The undergraduate perspective. *The Canadian Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 11*(3). https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2020.3.8328

Designing courses that are desirable

Visceral Design
(Beauty)

Behavioural Design
(Function)

Reflective Design
(Reflection)

Human Design
(Connection)

"visceral" icon by Paul Stevens, from the Noun Project. Used under a CC BY 3.0 license; Vilisov, iStock / Getty Images Plus; MikeFirsov, iStock / Getty Images Plus; dar woto, iStock / Getty Images Plus (Copyrighted image. Do not copy, modify, or

redistribute).
UXDL Honeycomb

The **Desirable** cell of the UXDL framework captures the importance of creating content that can evoke the kind of affective (emotional) responses from your learners that are conducive to **significant learning** and demonstrates to your learners that you also care about their learning and experiences in your course. When we talk about the affective dimension of learning we are not just referring to basic emotions (joy, sadness, anger, fear, etc.,) but are also referring to important **cognitive emotions**, such as **curiosity**, **interest**, **surprise**, and **motivation,** as well as more negative emotions such as **confusion**, **frustration**, **embarrassment**, or even **shame**. We want to foster those positive learning emotions and mitigate some of those negative cognitive emotions.

Creating a desirable course is not simply about making your course look pretty, rather it is about taking into consideration the elements in your course design that influence the emotions that modulate **significant learning.** While it may be easier to see the connection between affective design and how that design may impact significant learning in the **caring, integration,** and **human** dimensions, a course designed with these desirable principles in mind can impact learning in each of the other dimensions through the **interest, motivation, learner buy-in, relevance** realization, and **reflection** they facilitate.

The Desirable cell emphasizes the important role of the following strategies on virtual learner experience:

- **Good visceral design** and the role of aesthetic appeal on learner experience and buy-in.
- **Good behavioural design** and the impact of how your course functions on learners.
- **Good reflective design** and how design can lead learners towards deeper understanding, self-relevance, and reflection.
- **Good human design** that highlights the critical role that humanizing learning plays in design, which much of this course is about.

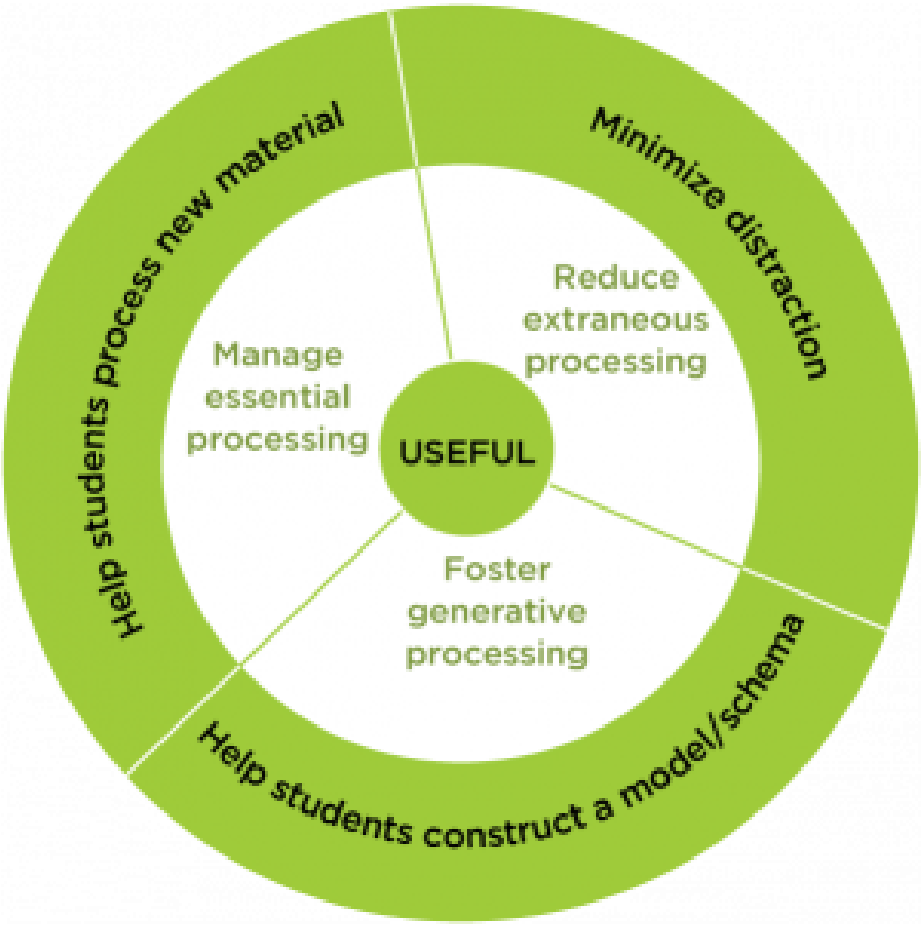
Some negatively perceived cognitive emotions can be helpful in small doses and are a natural part of learning, such as mild confusion, as that is often what precedes a real shift in understanding, but we never want a learner to feel shame around their efforts to learn. The strategies encompassed by the Desirable cell are part of helping learners **care** (a significant goal of learning) about the content. Emotions have a cool way of changing how we think and process information. Implementing a couple key strategies to create **desirable learning experiences in content and assessment design** can bolster those helpful cognitive emotions in your course and can go a long way to improving learner experiences and outcomes in your course.

Going deeper

To learn more about these **Desirable** strategies view the following page, which provides a brief description of each strategy with some examples.

- How Do We Create DESIRABLE Online Learning Experiences?

Designing courses that are useful



Credit: University of Waterloo, UXDL Honeycomb

The **Useful** cell of the UXDL honeycomb emphasizes the importance of and provides guidance on how to

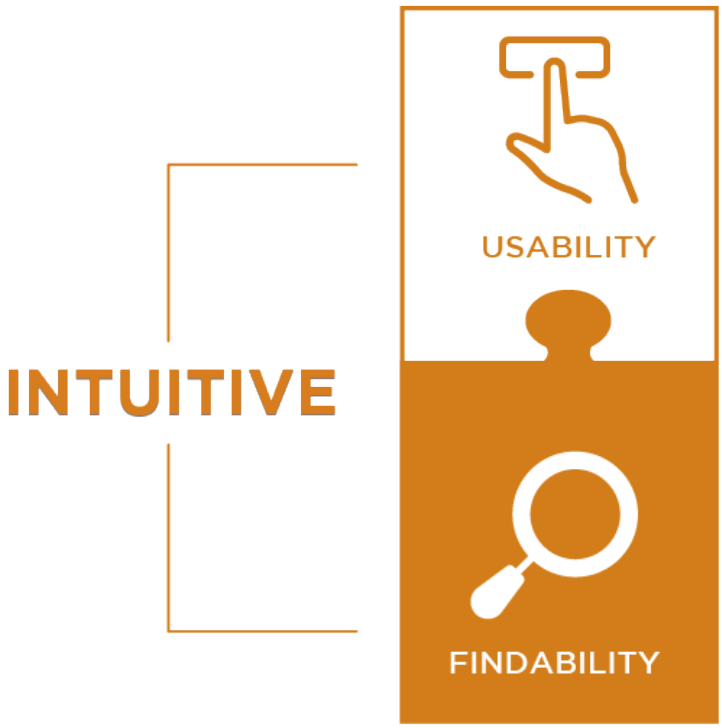
- **avoid cognitive overload** in how you present information to your learners;
- **help learners select, organize, and integrate information** to construct meaning and enhance retention;
- **reduce extraneous processing** so learners do not need to overcome unnecessary distractions and are guided through the content to what is most relevant;
- **manage essential processing** so that learners are not unnecessarily dividing their attention and information is presented in manageable and meaningful chunks; and
- **foster generative processing** by presenting content in a way that helps learners organize and integrate information within the course and with their prior knowledge and provides them with valuable opportunities to test and get feedback on their learning.

Going deeper

To learn more about these **Useful** strategies view the following page, which provides a brief description of each strategy and examples.

- How Do We Create USEFUL Online Learning Experiences?

Designing courses that are intuitive



"find" icon by DinosoftLab and "Easy use" icon by Martins Ratku, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Courses that are difficult to navigate or are not intuitive tend to evoke unhelpful negative emotions and lead to frustration as learners grapple with navigating the course rather than focusing on the content and activities. This cell in the UXDL framework is composed of two cells that are closely yoked, **Usability** and **Findability**.

- **Findability** refers to course navigation, content and activities that are easy to find.
- **Usability** refers to how easy it is to use, engage with or complete content, activities, or assignments once they are found.

When we design a course that is intuitive (where things are easy to find and easy to use), we remove some of the unnecessary negative emotions and effort that learners need to put into finding and using our course materials, so they can focus on the learning.

Going deeper

To learn more about these Intuitive design strategies view the following page, which provides a brief description of some strategies and an outline of how you can get feedback on your course design by conducting your own UX testing with learners to identify where they may struggle.

- How Do We Create INTUITIVE (Findable & Usable) Online Learning Experiences?

Three ways to get feedback on the intuitiveness (findability/usability) of your course:

1. If you would like to do your own UX testing with a sample of learners (5 is recommended) here are some resources to help you set that up:
    - Example UX Orientation Script and Tasks (PDF)

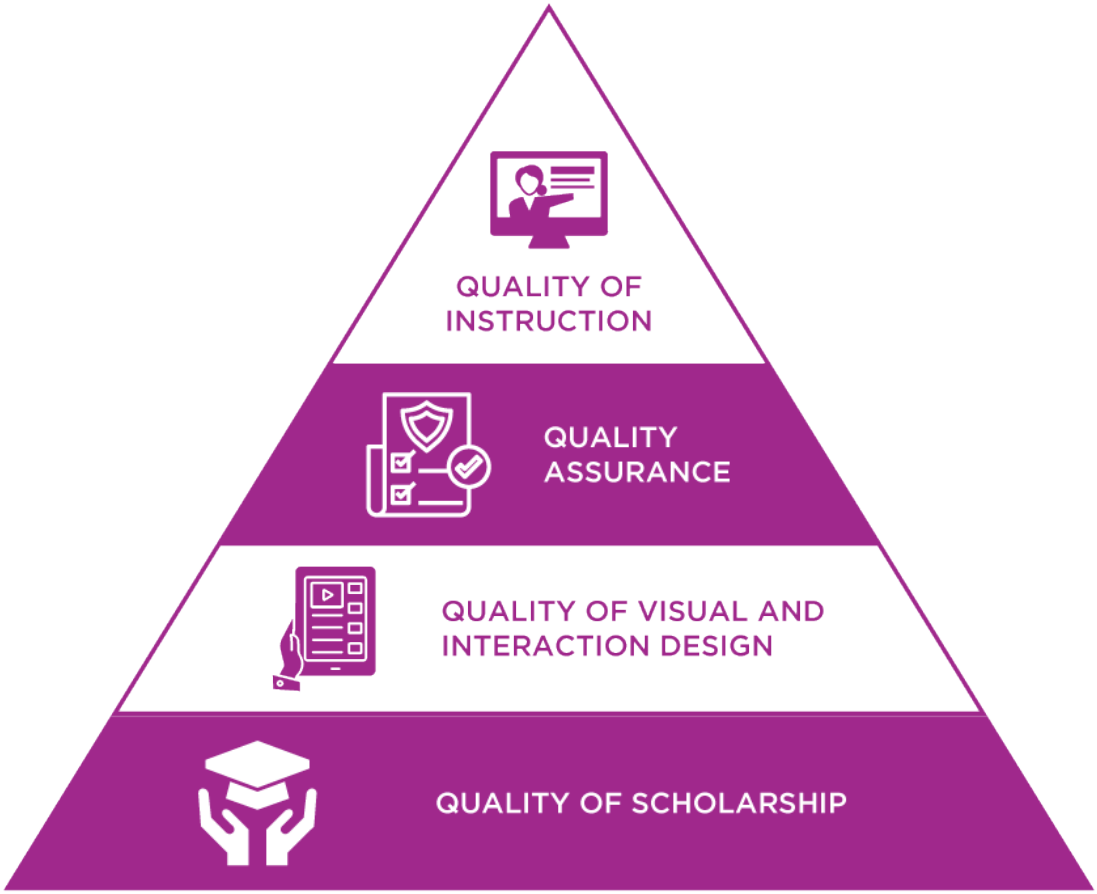
Wondering about why 5 UX participants is the magic number? This article explains:

- "Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users"

2. If you have TA support, you **could ask your TAs to navigate the course** and let you know if anything was unclear or confusing, where they got lost or struggled to find something, and what is working well and what may not be working as intended. Create a find and seek activity (list of tasks that will take them all through the course looking for important information), which will also help to serve as the TAs' orientation to your course.

3. **Instructor peer-review each other's courses for UX**. With a colleague with whom you feel comfortable sharing your virtual course, test the UX of each other's course and provide constructive feedback to each other. This has the added benefit of **putting you in the role of the learner**, which can bring fresh insight into the learner experience that may help you further improve the navigation in your own course.

Designing courses that are credible



"scholarship" icon by Cuputo; "online teaching" icon by Nubaia Karim Barsha; "List" icon by nareerat jaikaew; and "Learning" icon by Icongeek26, from the Noun Project. Used under a CC BY 3.0 license.

Credibility really comes through all the facets of a quality virtual course, from how you as an instructor present yourself and support learners, to the intuitiveness of the course, to how it looks and feels, to whether materials are presented in a useful way for learners. Credibility is about building **rapport**, **trust**, and a relationship in which learners see you as an expert in the field and trust you as a teacher.

Credibility captures strategies that demonstrate

- **quality of scholarship** through how you have designed and authored the course and models the kind of scholarship you expect learners to demonstrate in their learning, such as proper citation style;
- **quality of visual and interaction design** through pleasant visual design that gives the sense that the course is current, up-to-date, relevant, and shows learners that you care. Learners frequently make the association between a pleasant visual design and credibility of the material and reputation of the instructor. A simple, clean design can go a long way;
- **quality of assurance** one that is free of grammatical and spelling errors, uses software that is set up properly and works efficiently, and is accessible for all learners. Prompt in-term technical support contributes to a quality learning experience for learners studying online; and
- **quality of instruction** through clearly articulating to learners your expectations of them and how they will

be assessed (e.g., through learning outcomes and well-aligned content, activities, and assessments) and being available for and engaging with your learners throughout the term.

Going deeper

To learn more about these **Credible** design strategies view the following page:

- How Do We Create CREDIBLE Online Learning Experiences?

Designing courses that are accessible

Credit: Audio by Alice Design from thenounproject.com; font size by Gregor Cresnar from thenounproject.com; Visual Assets by Melvin from thenounproject.com; choice by Dong Ik Seo from thenounproject.com; choice by Nithinan Tatah from thenounproject.com

This cell of the UXDL framework provides a brief overview of the importance of creating courses that are accessible for all learners. Access is probably one of the most important factors to consider in designing your course, as without access learners are isolated and excluded from learning. Further, it is not just learners who have self-identified as having a disability that benefit from strategies that make a course more universally accessible. As a starting point, the Accessible cell of the UXDL framework provides some guidance on making a course more accessible, for example you can:

- **Provide multiple means of representation** or present content and information in different ways.
- **Provide multiple means of action and expression** or allow learners to express what they know in different ways.
- **Provide multiple means of engagement** or offer options to stimulate interest and motivate learners.

In the next module of this course we are going to talk more about accessibility and the idea of designing your course in a way that makes it more universally accessible to more people known as **Universal Design for Learning**.

Going deeper

To learn more about these **Accessible** strategies view the following page, which provides a brief description of each strategy and examples.

- How Do We Create ACCESSIBLE Online Learning Experiences?

Strategies in action: Examples of UXDL applied to virtual courses

In this section we present some examples of virtual courses that were designed using the UXDL principles.

The following strategies foster

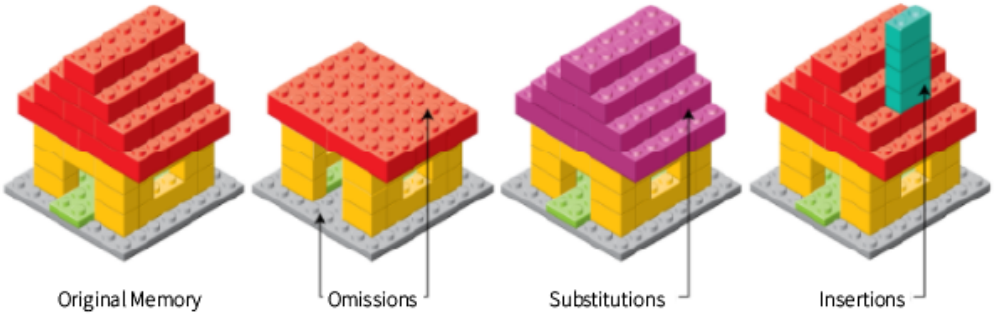
- **connection:** learner-content;
- **significant learning**: foundational knowledge, integration, care, learning to learn; and
- **context:** all virtual courses, across disciplines and class sizes

Creating a valuable learning environment with limited resources

Even if you have limited time and resources at hand and you are working with a text-based Learning Management System (LMS) as your main content delivery method, there are many simple, yet effective ways to create an effective, humanized learning experience for your learners. Here are some tips to enhance the UXDL of simple, text-based LMS courses:

- **Complete your LMS profile**: Upload a profile picture to the system and complete any other default information so your presence in the online space is solidified.
- **Present a credible start to the course**: Ensure that by the first day of class you have uploaded your syllabus, a timeline of activities and assessments for the whole semester (all module/content open/start dates, assignment deadlines, etc.), welcome announcement for your course (with photo and/or video), and the first week's material, including all assignment descriptions (rubrics can be released later if needed). Even if you still have much work to prepare for the rest of the semester, the learner can gain confidence in what the expectations are from them and get comfortable with your style of teaching and content presentation. Consider creating a **liquid syllabus**, as was demonstrated in an earlier section in this module.
- **Create the skeleton of the rest of the course**: Decide how you will release subsequent content and create 'shells' for this content (if not yet created or updated) by the first day of the course, setting to release at a certain date; this way (a) you already have logically thought through the entirety of the virtual presentation of your materials, and (b) learners can anticipate when they will receive access to future content as the release date (but not the content) will be visible to them.
- **Help learners navigate and understand how course information (concepts and knowledge) is structured**: Break your content down into short meaningful chunks, making use of
    - **hierarchical headings** (learners can better navigate and find concepts and understand how concepts are scaffolded and/or related),
    - **bolding and indentation/tabs** (ensure important information stands out), and
    - **bulleted and numbered lists** (help to break up text and depict concepts in easy-to-remember format).

- **Be consistent**: Even if all you do is present some short text, embed a short overview video/presentation/ mini lecture, and post a couple articles/resources in your LMS as the core of the learning content for each of your modules, present it in a consistently formatted style, paying attention how you name links and files. Simple can be great, as long as there is attention to detail!
- **Avoid duplication of critical information** (mistakes happen). For example, only listing due dates in one place (i.e., the course schedule) makes it easier for you to make changes, means the learner only needs to check one location to find that important information, and they will not second guess it or run into conflicting information elsewhere in the course.
- **Provide a way for learners to interact with each other in the first week**, whether through a discussion board or a collaborative application (more on this in the next section of this module).
- **Consider creating summary graphics**: Even if you don't have time/resources to develop a highly interactive course module/page, could you increase the significant learning in your course by creating word maps/flow charts/frameworks to present to learners with each module of content, to help them connect various ideas and concepts together? These types of image can be easily constructed in common software like Microsoft PowerPoint and saved as images.



Visual that aids memory. Screenshot of a visual that uses the metaphor of a Lego house to depict memory errors; PSYCH 101, Module 1b
Credit: Dr. Paul Wehr, Department of Psychology, and Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

These strategies help with

- **credibility**: The learners can easily appreciate the care you put in to prepare the learning space for them, as they will be able to quickly find all the information they need for the first week of the course, and be able to understand and predict the expectations of them for the rest of the course; and
- **findability and usability**: Even if the page is still in progress, a framework is presented of how the virtual space will "grow" with time, bringing confidence and assurances to the learner. Pages that are well structured, with clear headings help the learner navigate the content and find concepts.

Quick tips and tricks: Limited resources, keep it simple

The remainder of the examples in this section are courses that engaged collaborative teams in their creation (e.g., the instructor(s) with institutional/departmental multimedia professionals, instructional designers, coders, etc.) however, the **principles highlighted** in these examples can be achieved even if you have few resources to enhance the value and positive impact of

- text-based courses in an LMS,
- slides,
- instructor notes, and
- assessment design and instructions.

Civil engineering videos for a blended course

The University of Waterloo Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering's Wayne Brodland and Rania Al-Hammoud have developed a series of educational videos that can be used in blended or fully online virtual courses. These videos are created to augment key experiential learning activities that learners would undertake in Brodland's and Al-Hammoud's Intro to Civil Engineering course. In-class time constraints mean that learners are not able to complete all of these hands-on learning activities. With this suite of videos, learners can vicariously experience each of Professor Brodland's hands-on learning models through a blended learning approach.

Here the creators made careful use of

- **segmenting**: this is achieved by breaking content into small, easily digestible segments (~5–10 mins), which gives learners the key information in meaningful chunks and also gives them a natural pause that helps them regulate their attention;
- **signalling**: this is done with words and highlighting on-screen that directs the eye to relevant points in the video;
- **visceral, behavioural, reflective, and human design**: these principles are modeled here through the carefully created and higher production value videos, with relatable examples that encourage learners to recall moments where they have experienced the forces described in the video, so as to build a more intuitive sense of how these forces work in the world and are more than just equations; and
- **credibility**: The production quality of the course materials and the modeling of academic standards, such as proper use of citations lend credibility to these videos.

Engineering Models Channel — Introduction (Video length ~ 3 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1002#oembed-1

Transcript for Engineering Models Channel — Introduction available on YouTube.

This video provided a brief introduction to all the different instructional videos in this Youtube channel. To see these UXDL principles in action consider watching some of these Engineering Models videos highlighted in the introduction video in full. If you teach Civil Engineering or topics related to these videos, the creator, Professor Wayne Brodland also has designed activities, as well as instructions on how to create the physical models in the videos if you would like to use them for in-class activities.

Mechanics Models (additional teaching materials and resources)

Math course example

This module was created by the Mathematics Department at the University of Waterloo. This example demonstrates

- **segmenting**: Videos are broken into small chunks and each video is subdivided further;
- **accessibility**: There is a text alternative for learners that don't learn best from video; and
- **foster generative processing through feedback on learning**: This course provides valuable self-assessment quizzes that provide learners with not only feedback on their learning, but help them understand where they are going wrong.

Linear Algebra 1

Introductory video on the scientific method

The Scientific Method example below is an open resource describing how the scientific method works by using global climate change as an example. It uses the following UXDL principles to help learners select, organize, and integrate relevant information:

- **Multimedia:** The resource includes a combination of text, images, video, and interaction, which helps learners to attend to and stay focused on the material but also to learn it efficiently, as they organize and integrate the visual and verbal representations and actively engage in meaning-making;
- **Coherence:** Content is well-structured and uses lots of white space; images do a great job of depicting spatial relationships and are used to enhance understanding or otherwise contribute to the experience of reading the text;
- **Segmenting:** Text-based content is broken into easily readable chunks with images, video, and interactions interspersed throughout to aid understanding;
- **Signalling:** This is done with icons and call-out boxes; and
- **Credibility:** The production quality of the video in particular, and the proper use of citations lend credibility to the resource.

The Scientific Method

Credit: Keith Delaney, Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Chemistry for engineers module

This example course is an open course on Chemistry for Engineers which uses the following UXDL principles to help learners select, organize, and integrate relevant information:

- **Multimedia:** organizational visuals paired with text help learners construct a schema of the concepts introduced, actively engaging them in meaning-making;
- **Coherence:** content is well-structured and uses lots of white space; images are used to depict spatial relationships and to put human faces on the theories introduced;
- **Segmenting:** text-based content is broken into easily readable chunks with images interspersed to aid

understanding;

- **Signalling:** is done here with the theorist call-out box, and the highlighted words inside the box.;**Reflection and testing effect:** learners have the opportunity to get feedback on their learning through concept checks.

Chemistry for Engineers: 2. States of Matter

Credit: Jason Grove, Department of Engineering, and Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Sustainable cities module

The following open module, on Sustainable Cities: Adding an African Perspective is another good example of several UXDL principles.

The following video from this course provides an example of the **modality principle.** The modality principle involves pairing spoken words with visuals to reduce cognitive load and facilitate learning of essential but cognitively complex material.

Population Projections (Video length ~ 13 min video, but first 1:15 min provides a good sample)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1002#oembed-2

Transcript for Population Projections available on YouTube.

Credit: Nadine Ibrahim, Department of Engineering, and Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Strategies in action: Authentic and personally meaningful assessments

Designing assessments that guide learners to find personally meaningful connections with course content can have a huge impact on learning and will increase the **desirability** of a course – the degree to which learners experience positive learning emotions (interest, curiosity, engagement) and care. Giving them some control over their learning and assessments can really foster transformational significant learning that will stick with learners for years to come.

This strategy fosters

- **connection**: learner–content;
- **significant learning**: foundational knowledge, application, integration, care, human dimension; and
- **context**: across disciplines and class sizes (group assignment modifications for larger classes).

Individual advocacy assignment

Sometimes it can be difficult to bring personal relevance to "hard science" courses. One way to counter this is to think of how learners can advocate for a cause or issue related to the course materials. This can bring in social, environmental, ethical, political, or other dimensions which may not be directly covered by core course content.

In this example, learners in a fourth-year undergraduate neuroscience course have the opportunity to understand the personal and situational challenges and experiences of individuals living with learning and memory disorders. The assignment requires students to study the clinical characteristics of the disorder, treatment options, and community support program available to support the integration of these individuals into society.

There are two paths learners can take with the assignment:

1. A more advocacy-focused approach involving interviewing a patient with the disorder (or their caregiver) and writing an individual advocacy report.
2. An approach more focused on a scholarly review of the disorder and a review of treatment and community resources available to patients with that disorder in general.

Skills developed in this assignment:

- **Scholarship and caring**: students exercise their ability to use scholarly research to review the scientific understanding of this disorder, and have developed their capacity for empathy and advocacy after learning and considering the lived experience of individuals with the disorder.
- **Communication**: students practice writing with different audiences in mind – their disorder review will be geared towards peers or academics, while the advocacy component should be geared to a lay person in the community.
- **Learning to learn**: students provide a short critical review of another student's report on a different disorder, giving them an opportunity to learn about another disorder and practice their peer review skills.

The learners are provided with

- a detailed assignment description that ensures both paths of the assignment remained equivalent in amount of work expected from the learner;
- support and connections to local organizations should they need help finding an interviewee;
- a date mid-way in the semester to declare their topic and interview plan (if applicable) for approval;
- a template for a basic letter of Information and consent form that learners who will be interviewing individuals could use; and
- a grading rubric used to guide peer-review and evaluation by the instructor.

What instructors have to say:

"The Disorder/Advocacy assignment is the capstone assignment of the course. After being exposed the neuroscience of learning and memory and various ethical issues throughout the modules, students now do a deep dive into a learning and memory disorder of their choice and consider the ethical and advocacy challenges around how individuals with that disorder are cared for and integrated into society. Many students love this assignment and feel that it really prepares them for their future in healthcare. For those who chose to do the interview with an affected individual, it can be a transformational experience. Their eyes are opened to the bigger picture of medicine – not just knowing how organs work and how medicines treat illness – but the challenge of treating the whole person within the context they live. I have received incredible, very moving,

and sometimes publication-worthy papers from my top students. As an instructor, reading these has been the highlight of my teaching career."
(Dr. Susan Boehnke, online instructor)

Credit: Dr. Susan Boehnke, Centre for Neuroscience Studies, Queen's University.

Strategies in action: Activities and assignments that build learner–content connection

The K. Patricia Cross Academy offers a huge number of example activities and assessments that you can use to help increase student engagement across a wide variety of courses and settings. Below you will find links to a few examples that we think you will find valuable when designing your course (please scroll down to find videos on how to adapt each technique to the online environment). Each of these examples helps to bridge the distance between students and course content by employing principles like

- **signalling relevance** by connecting course content to current events, or by signalling the significance of readings and other content through guided exercises;
- **encouraging collaboration** between students by creating opportunities for students to learn content together in active ways that go beyond the traditional web forum; and
- **encouraging metacognition** through reflection on content and sharing reflections so that students have a chance to stop and think about what they are learning and why, and to share these reflections for the benefit of others.

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–content;
- **significant learning:** foundational knowledge, integration, application, caring, learning to learn; and
- **context**: all class sizes and disciplines.

Contemporary issues journal

The contemporary issues journal is an activity in which students take time to think about the connections between what they are learning and a contemporary issue or current events.
Contemporary Issues Journal (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Team Jeopardy

Team Jeopardy is a synchronous activity (which can be done online with video conferencing) that allows students to learn content actively together with a jeopardy-style quiz game.
Team Jeopardy (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Three-minute messages activity

Three-minute messages is an activity in which students distill key concepts and share their presentations with one another to help clarify difficult ideas for themselves and share the benefit of such clarifications.
Three-Minute Messages (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Active reading documents activity

Active reading documents is a guided reading activity that allows you to infuse some instructor presence into student reading time through guided reading activities that can be completed asynchronously.
Active Reading Documents (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Guided notes activity

Guided notes is an activity that creates further structure surrounding lecture content so that students can more efficiently process and assimilate new information.
Guided Notes (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Lecture engagement log

Lecture engagement log is an activity that encourages metacognition among students as they engage with lecture materials and other content, and provides further instructor presence especially during asynchronous lecture delivery.
Lecture Engagement Log (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Online resource scavenger hunt activity

Online resource scavenger hunt is an activity that helps learners engage with course content while providing them with the opportunity to practice performing the difficult and important task of navigating online resources to find relevant and reliable information/sources online.
Online Resource Scavenger Hunt (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Reflect and apply: Designing with the learner in mind

Identify some implementable design strategies from the User Experience for Design for Learning Framework that you can apply in your own course to help learners better connect with content, activities, and assignments. Use the table below to

- identify a strategy for each cell in the UXDL framework that you could implement at some point;
- identify the specific strategy that interests you;

- outline for yourself some ideas about how or where you'll implement it; and
- help you select strategies that will have the highest impact in your course; identify how that strategy may **align** or support some of your course **goals** and/or help learners **prepare for assessments** and/or how this may help address one of the **challenges you or your learners have experienced** in your course (or you are worried about experiencing).

UXDL Alignment Table (docx)

UXDL Cell (Desirable, Useful, Intuitive, Accessible, Credible)	**Specific principle in this UXDL Cell**	**Approach/Strategy (What you will do in your course)**	**Alignment and/or challenges mitigated**
Example: Useful	Example: Foster generative processing	Example: I will build in ungraded self-assessment quizzes at the end of each module	Example: This is aligned with **Course goals** • Foundational Knowledge • Learning about Learning **Assessments** • Midterm tests and final exam, which will have questions in the same format as the self-assessment practice questions **This helps mitigate the previous issues of** • Learners not being prepared for the midterm and exam
Desirable Useful Credible Intuitive Accessible			

References and credits

Troop, M., White, D., Wilson, K. E., & Zeni, P. (2020). The User Experience Design for Learning (UXDL) Framework: The undergraduate student perspective. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 11*(3). https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2020.3.8328

University of Waterloo, UXDL Honeycomb

1.6 Learner-learner connection: Designing authentic peer teaching and learning opportunities

Key principles: The importance of peer connection and collaboration in learning

Learner–learner connection takes place any time learners socialize, support one another, learn together, collaborate, or engage in discussion. Quality learner–learner interaction has great potential to create authentic connections and **learning across all of Fink's dimensions of significant learning**:

- Foundational knowledge
- Application
- Integration
- Human dimension
- Caring
- Learning to learn

"student" icon by The Icon Z, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

As with other aspects of online teaching and learning, many key decisions about how to cultivate learner–learner interaction are made during the design and development phase of a course.

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Learner–learner interactions in online courses can be broken down into three basic types:

1. **Social and content-based interactions**: discussions and colearning.
2. **Assessment-based interactions**: group assignments and projects.
3. **Peer-to-peer teaching and assessments**: presentations and peer feedback.

Key principles: Tools of communication and collaboration

There are many digital tools that can be used to facilitate learner interactions.

Tools of communication commonly found in LMSs:

- Text-based discussion in LMS forums (asynchronous)
- Email (asynchronous)
- Text chats in LMS (asynchronous or synchronous)

In addition to the traditional asynchronous exchange of text, modern online courses often feature other **modern digital tools** (also known as educational technology or EdTech tools) that allow learners to communicate in different ways.

Digital tools of communication typically external to LMSs:

- Threaded asynchronous video (e.g., Voice Thread, Flipgrid)
- Synchronous audio and video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams)
- Learner blogs (e.g., Blogger, WordPress)
- Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok)
- Peer-feedback platforms (e.g., peerScholar, PeerMark in Turnitin, Feedback Fruits, PeerWise, Aropä)
- Collaborative reading and annotation tools (e.g., Hypothesis, Perusall)
- Collaborative work/authoring software (e.g., Google Drive and suite of apps, suite of Office365 applications)
- Live engagement tools (e.g., Mentimeter, Kahoot!, Padlet)

Things to consider when choosing a tool

When selecting tools, it is important to think carefully and choose wisely. First and foremost, you will always want to design your learner collaboration activity before choosing the tool you want to use to make it happen. Choosing a tool first often ends up producing activities that are less effective than they could be. Sometimes the best activities use the simplest and least flashy tools, while other times the extra features of more powerful tools are crucial to making your activity work.

Once you have a plan for a great collaboration activity, the tools you select will affect the nature of learner communication and collaboration in many important ways. Thoughtful use of digital communication tools can really help to reduce transactional distance between learners, but **the use of various communication and collaboration tools is a double-edged sword,** as new tools can distract your learners, or introduce complexity or accessibility problems to your course that can increase barriers to communication. As Darby & Lang explain,

These are powerful tools—powerfully beneficial or powerfully distracting. Be purposeful.
(p. 70)

Here are some things to consider when selecting a tool for communication and collaboration:

- **Is this tool necessary** or can the same **learning outcomes** be achieved using tools within the LMS? Each new tool comes at a cost to learners, even if it is free, as they have to learn how to use that tool, navigate new interfaces, and find information in different places; is that cost necessary?
- How many tools are you asking your learners to use in your course? A good rule of thumb is your **LMS plus one** other tool or technology.
- **Is the tool accessible** to all learners, including those who are visually or hearing impaired? If the answer is no, you may be systematically excluding students. How will those learners be included and have the same opportunity to connect and learn with their peers?
- Is there a **financial cost** to you or your learners? Are there participant limits on free licences?
- Does the tool put **your learners' privacy or security** at risk? Most tools that are recommended or centrally supported by your institution have likely gone through a privacy and security review and are the safest bet to ensure your learners are not exposed to risk using the tool.

Going deeper

If you are interested in learning about the top tools, the following resource is created each year:

- Top 300 Tools for Learning

The following rubric is a resource you may find helpful in evaluating tools and making the right decision for your course learning goals and outcomes:

- An Interactive Rubric for Evaluating eLearning Tools

Social and content-based interactions and discussions

Regardless of the medium or tool, social and content-based learner interactions all involve learners responding to a given prompt, exercise, or assignment in conversation with one another. This often takes places in asynchronous discussions using web forums, but can also occur using synchronous conferencing, as well as other tools such as asynchronous video discussions and beyond. What defines a "discussion" in our usage is that, for these types of interactions, the **expected outcome of learner interaction is the interaction itself**. By interacting, learners pool their resources to help advance their mutual understanding of key course content, and develop greater skills in analyzing and assessing course concepts. In addition, they get to know one another and build a greater sense of social cohesion and community in the course.

The purpose of discussion interactions may be content-oriented, purely social, or may mix the two. In general, purely social discussions take place early in the life of an online course, while content-based discussions tend to take shape a little later on, once learners have more knowledge under their belt.

Assessment-based interaction

Group assignments and projects are the most common form of this type of learner-learner interaction and if you've taught before, you'll know that learners either love them or hate them. There are some common reasons learners do not enjoy "group work" and there are several ways to circumvent these pitfalls to ensure collaborative learning is a valuable and rewarding experience for most of your learners.

Secret ingredients to creating group assignments that are valuable and get learner buy-in

Authenticity: Authentic assignments align with and are clearly relevant to the course learning outcomes and learning goals, and the connection between the assignment and these goals is clearly articulated. The most authentic assessments also align with what is meaningful and relevant to your learners. Allowing for more self-directed learning in group work and giving learners the freedom to be creative and make decisions about the format and/or topic of their project is a great way to help ensure projects are meaningful to learners.
The project requires a team-based approach: When projects are not complex enough to warrant a group-approach (e.g., there is not enough work for everyone to contribute equally) learners can get the impression that the project was not designed for their learning, and it is difficult for them to distribute the work evenly. Naturally some people will step up and do more and others less. When learners feel that an assignment would have been easier to complete alone, rather than in a group, they often resent it. Having your learners work in groups can be a nice way to reduce grading workload; however, you'll get more enthusiasm and buy-in for group work if it's clear to learners how the group format is benefiting their work/learning.
Clear guidance on how to collaborate: Often learners need some guidance and support in how to interact and collaborate online. Provide learners with guidance on how to interact as a group, clear expectations around identifying roles, and a mechanism for ensuring everyone is contributing (see the **Group Contract**

resource below in the Strategies in action section titled **Group Social Intervention Assignment** for a templated resource to help with this). Provide guidance around platforms for communication and tools for collaboration that are recommended by your institution.

Peer-to-peer teaching and assessments

Peer-to-peer teaching and assessment interactions involve colearning (as do social and content-based interactions). However peer-to-peer teaching and assessments tend to be more formal or structured in that each learner has the opportunity to take the role of "teacher" and "learner" at different points or stages of an activity or assessment.

Peer-to-peer teaching gives learners the chance to essentially switch roles and see the content, their peers, and their own learning from the perspective of a teacher. Building in meaningful and authentic opportunities for learners to teach and learn from each other can be a powerful and memorable way of fostering the **human** and **learning to learn** dimensions of significant learning, as well as strengthening **foundational knowledge**, **integration**, and **positive student attitudes toward learning** (Zhang et al., 2017). Teaching their peers provides learners with unique insight into the content of the course and their own understanding. This approach can also build empathy for you, the instructor, as they step into your shoes.

Going deeper

Eric Mazur has done a lot of work on peer-to-peer instruction and has some helpful resources on his website.

- Peer Instruction

Peer-to-peer assessment and feedback can help learners assess both their peers and their own work from a different lens. It is critical that learners are provided with **instruction on how to assess and provide formative feedback** that is constructive and sensitive and aligned with the assessment goals before engaging in peer-to-peer assessments and feedback. For example, demonstrate for them what supportive feedback looks like and what is inappropriate or can be hurtful. Providing learners with **grading rubrics** can be especially helpful in showing them how to assess others' work as well as their own.

If you incorporate peer teaching and assessment into your course, consider framing these activities as ways to **connect**, **support each other**, and **build the class learning community.** Acknowledging that **it takes courage** for your learners to open up to peer teaching and evaluation can also help to **validate** some of the anxiety they may feel around these activities. Your learners are making themselves vulnerable when they evaluate one another, so acknowledge this and take extra steps to **set expectations and guidelines** that will help learners feel safe as they step outside their comfort zone.

Types of learner–learner interaction and associated activities

Social/content-based

Various forum types:

- Introductions

- Learning support (Q&A)
- Topic discussions
- Seminar discussions
- Social chat

Other discussions and communication:

- Threaded video discussions
- Video or audio posts to course forums
- Synchronous video or audio discussions
- Social media
- Interactive document collaboration
- Emails, texts, and phone calls between students (typically not required but often take place informally)

Assessment-based

Types of major group projects:

- final papers
- reports
- studies
- reviews
- case studies
- software or coding projects
- prototypes/item builds
- group presentations

Types of group presentations:

- video presentations
- narrated slides or PowerPoints
- audio presentations
- public-facing presentations
- foreign language presentations

Other projects:

- short films and videos
- recorded role-playing scenarios
- creative and art projects
- podcasts
- blogs
- wikis

Peer assessment

Peer review or assessment can be formal or informal, and it can be assigned as a part of nearly any course activity, using a wide variety of tools. Some examples for individual or group work includes

- feedback on written work,

- providing peer feedback using a rubric,
- feedback on presentations (can also be done so that learners can implement any changes ahead of formal evaluation),
- assessment of peers' participation in the course discussions (usually confidential),
- reviews of other reviews (giving feedback on how helpful another student's feedback was),and
- assessment of other group members' participation in group projects (usually confidential).

Key principles: Aligning peer activities with the natural life cycle of learner–learner interactions

The role that learner–learner interaction plays in generating engagement and significant learning is not static during a course but changes as the course moves forward. Since the early days of online education, researchers have observed that learner–learner interactions in online courses typically go through **three major phases** (Brown, 2001; Downing et al., 2007):

1. **Socially formative phase**, where learners get to know each other and form social bonds.
2. **Socially instrumental phase**, where learners interact mainly to help one another learn course materials and (if required) work on projects together.
3. **Withdrawal phase** near the end the course, when learner-learner interaction tends to wane, but their engagement and focus has typically increased but is directed towards final assessments. Note that anxiety levels tend to be higher around this time, which may also contribute to more withdrawal.

The role of learner–learner interaction with respect to learning and engagement differs between these various phases.

Phase 1. Socially formative phase
Learners get to know one another and form social bonds

Phase 2. Socially instrumental phase
Learners interact for the purposes of learning content and/or working on projects

Phase 3. Withdrawal phase
Learner-learner interaction recedes somewhat as learners focus on final assessments, exams, etc.
Image Description (PDF) | © ma_rish/iStock/Getty Images (Copyrighted image. Do not copy, modify, or redistribute)

Naturally, the dividing lines between the phases are not exact, but in general, you can expect learners' desire to interact with each other will follow this basic sequence as the term progresses and it can be tremendously helpful to **design your learner-learner interactions and assessments around this natural ebb and flow.**

Going deeper

If you would like to read a little more about **the life cycle of learner-learner interactions** you can find a more detailed summary here:

- Fostering Engagement: Facilitation Courses in Higher Education – 5b. How Student–Student Interaction Leads to Engagement

Further reading on this topic:

- Brown, R. E. (2001). The process of community-building in distance learning classes. *Journal of asynchronous learning networks, 5*(2), 18–35.

- Downing, K. J., Lam, T., Kwong, T., Downing, W., & Chan, S. (2007). Creating interaction in online learning: A case study. *Research in learning technology, 15*(3), 201–215.

Reflect and apply: Reflecting on our learner–learner interactions

Consider your experience with learner–leaner interaction. Perhaps you have

- taught a virtual course before,
- are working on your first course, or
- you have been a learner in a virtual course.

Regardless of where you find yourself, use the interactive tool to guide your reflection on the learner–leaner interaction design and delivery. Complete the guided reflection in the table below and ensure to export your responses to your device once done.

- **If you have taught a virtual course before** and experimented with learner–learner interactions, make a list of interactions in your course and what you feel has gone well and what you feel did not go well or as planned.
- **If you have not yet taught virtually and/or are working on your first course,** make a list of some of your ideas for learner–learner interactions you are considering experimenting with in your first offer. Then, write out what you expect will go well and what you are worried may not go as planned.
- Alternatively, **if you have been a learner in a virtual course** with learner–learner interactions, you can complete this activity from the experiences you've had as a learner.

Then, **considering the natural life cycle of learner interactions**, does the timing of an interaction conflict or align with this natural ebb and flow of learners' desire to interact with each other?

If interactions are not aligned with these phases, consider altering the format of early or later in the term assessments, for example switching a group assignment late in the term to an individual assignment with peer-to-peer assessment or switching an individual assignment earlier in the term to a group assignment but making sure to increase the scope and/or complexity of the assignment and group contract (also called a team/group charter) so it makes sense as a team project.

Learner–Learner Interactions Table (DOCX)

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1122#h5p-17*

Strategies in action: Designing meaningful social interactions and discussions

In this section we provide some examples of discussion activities and paired interactions that can help learners make meaningful connections with each other and the content in your course, as well as developing communication skills.

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–learner, learner–content;
- **significant learning (modelling)**: foundational knowledge, application, integration, caring, and human connection; and
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Designing meaningful discussions

Online discussion can have mixed results. Some online discussions foster authentic connections and help learners engage more deeply with course concepts and each other, while others fall flat and can feel like 'busy work' for learners. The design of online discussions and how they fit in with the course learning outcomes and goals, as well as how they work with other assessments in a course can make or break online discussions. Virtual discussion tends to be more meaningful and engaging when

- **discussion questions are substantial** enough that there is enough for each learner to share a unique perspective and they cannot be answered with simple facts;
- **discussion questions provide opportunity for learners to draw on their own life or experience**, a domain in which they have extensive experience and knowledge. This can help them see how concepts are personally relevant and gives them an opportunity to share something about themselves;
- **learners are given time to prepare ahead of time** (e.g., complete a reading or activity that enables them to think through the problem/question ahead of time); and
- **learners are given space to engage**. This means not overwhelming learners with in-depth weekly discussions (discussions are time-consuming) or having discussions in weeks where other assessments are due. Also, ensure you provide enough time for initial posts and responses. A single asynchronous discussion typically transpires over an entire week. Give learners a break in between discussions.

Going deeper

To learn more about how to design seminar and discussion-based courses see the following resource:

- Remote Teaching: Seminars and Discussion-Based Courses

Graduate literature seminar discussion

This example is taken from a discussion forum in a graduate seminar course on the literature of Dostoevsky. In this case the forum explores theological and religious themes in the literature.

For this discussion assignment students have been asked during the previous weeks of the course to select their own readings from Dostoevsky's novels with guidance from the instructor, rather than all students reading the same selections. Students then present their responses to their readings with a short but formal essay (graded separately from the forum). Discussion then follows as students ask questions, with each student serving as an expert on certain themes and sections that they have chosen to investigate.

By allowing students to select their own readings and choose which topics to discuss, and by having each student bring their own unique reading experience to the forum, discussion is allowed to flow in accordance with student interest. In the case of this course, the result was substantially improved student participation in the forum, and genuine collective learning through peer-to-peer teaching in which the instructor served primarily as a guide and students became content experts in their own right.

Intensive discussions like this are not appropriate for use in every single week of the course as they take a great deal of time. In this case, during the seminar discussion week students had no other required activities for the course except to post and discuss their essays. This allowed students to invest the time needed for deep collective learning in an asynchronous format. For larger courses, the students could be assigned into groups for a discussion like this one.

- Graduate Literature Seminar Discussion Instructions (PDF)
- Graduate Literature Seminar Rubric (DOCX)

Credit: Dr. Daniel Opperwall, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Social or academic dyadic interviews

This strategy can be a great way to break the ice with students, particularly in smaller classes. You might consider having students interview several students and then in a whole-class forum (where each student has their own thread) they can share what they learned about the peers that they interviewed under that individual's thread.
Dyadic Interviews (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

To ensure learners are not asking inappropriate questions you may

- ask them to submit questions ahead of time,
- crowdsource the interview questions from the class in a discussion form and then distribute a final list of questions learners can choose from, or
- create your own set of questions that are either
    - social in nature and/or
    - help learners find connections between each other and topics or activities related to the course.

Strategies in action: Assessment-based interaction – Group projects

As discussed, there are many benefits to group projects for learners and they should be designed to leverage these benefits and to not merely reduce grading load (while they certainly can do that too). Working on a team is a skill that takes time and experience to learn, so if you are asking learners to do this there should be some benefit to their learning as well. This section includes some example group assessments and tools and resources you can use to design meaningful group activities that also reduce your grading load!

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–learner, learner–content;
- **significant learning (modelling)**: foundational knowledge, application, integration, caring, and human connection; and
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Analytic teams

While this is an example that fits both group-based and peer-to-peer interactions, it is a great example of how one can design a relatively contained (i.e., doesn't take the entire term to develop) group assignment that is engaging for learners and ensures each learner has a role:

- proponent
- critic
- example-giver
- summarizer
- question-preparer
- proposer-of-next-steps
- etc.

With specific roles and work assigned to individuals it is not easy for a learner to hide behind the work of someone else. The group can then submit a group report that outlines each phase of analysis and a summary of the discussion that took place. This scaffolds the process of critical analysis for learners and can work across larger and smaller class sizes, as well as most disciplines.
Analytic Teams (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Group social intervention assignment

The following assignment was used in a large (300+ learners) **introduction to social psychology** course, where learners were divided into groups of about six and were asked to come up with an intervention for teenagers related to relevant issues addressed by key topics and strategies they learned about the course. Learners had the freedom to choose their topic as well as their intervention approach (e.g., instructional materials for a teacher, a social media campaign, an information video, etc.).

The goal of this assignment was for learners to

- find meaningful connections between course content, real-world applications, and their own interests;
- gain some control over their learning and how they demonstrate that learning so the assignment would be more personally relevant and meaningful; and
- learn about and reflect on the process of collaboration and group dynamics (this is also a topic in this course).

The assignment was scaffolded, with several check in points, including

- clear and detailed social psychology group assignment instructions (PDF), which includes guidance on how to collaborate (PDF), how to submit documents (PDF), and details on how the assignments will be graded;
- establishing a group contract (DOCX, contract/agreement) that set the roles, expectations, and plan for the assignment;
- project proposal;
- submission of assignment and whole-class virtual showcase;
- peer and self-evaluations (PDF) on contributions to team and project; and
- self-reflection on contributions to the project.

This approach can make grading a little more challenging, so having a **clear and detailed rubric** can be very helpful at ensuring **transparency with your learners** and **consistency in grading.** The variety in terms of what learners create, however, can make the grading process much more interesting and rewarding. After the first offer of this course the course author shared,

What instructors have to say...

"I'm blown away by the creativity and high quality work that the students put into their group projects. There is a great variety of approaches that students took – including board games, social media campaigns, etc. I just wanted to let you know how well it turned out."

(Prof. Richard Eibach, online instructor)

This assignment also is a good model for how to guide learners in peer-to-peer assessment of each other, as

- it provides a framework for how learners should be evaluating their peers, with a similar activity of self-reflection where they will evaluate themselves;
- expectations are communicated early in the project and learners understand how they will be evaluating and be evaluated by their peers; and
- it includes guidance around providing feedback and discussing issues with team members early in the project, rather than waiting until the end and penalizing peers.

Strategies in action: Peer-to-peer teaching and assessments

In this section we provide example activities, assessments, and resources to help you build meaningful peer-to-peer teaching and assessments.

The following strategies foster

- **connection**: learner–learner, learner–content;
- **significant learning** (modelling): foundational knowledge, application, integration, caring, and human

connection, learning to learn; and
- **context**: all (STEM, Arts, large class, small class, novice learners, advanced learners)

Paper seminar

This strategy encourages learners to find a paper (or other course-related material) to summarize and teach to other learners. The other learners should be encouraged to participate and contribute to discussion.
Paper Seminar (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials, with synchronous and asynchronous options)

This can work across all disciplines and class sizes, with some modifications. For larger classes consider breaking the class into smaller groups and either

- have each person teach to the smaller group and the learners in each group contribute to a collaborative document that summarizes the presentation and discussion and submit that for assessment or
- have each group choose a paper or cluster of papers on a topic together and collaborate on a short presentation that they will present to the larger class. The larger class can participate through discussion and/or peer assessment, by providing a summary of what they learned in each presentation and an assessment of the presenters.

Translate that

This is a strategy that can be incorporated into content presentation, which encourages learners to translate information they just learned into their own words. Their translations are then shared with other learners, who then have the opportunity to see a concept explained in several different ways. This can work in both synchronous and asynchronous courses of all sizes and disciplines.
Translate That (two videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Jigsaw

This is another strategy that can get learners teaching each other and can work in small or large classes and in synchronous or asynchronous formats.
Jigsaw (2 videos ~5 mins total, with downloadable materials)

Reflect and apply: Creating opportunity for authentic peer connections

Based on what you have learned in this module either design or re-design a learner–learner interaction or assessment, aligning it with the natural life cycle of learner interactions, and/or using the resources provided in this module to ensure that the interaction is well articulated, expectations are clear, and learners have the tools they need to succeed at and enjoy these interactions.

References and credits

Brown, R. E. (2001). The process of community-building in distance learning classes. *Journal of asynchronous learning networks, 5*(2), 18–35.

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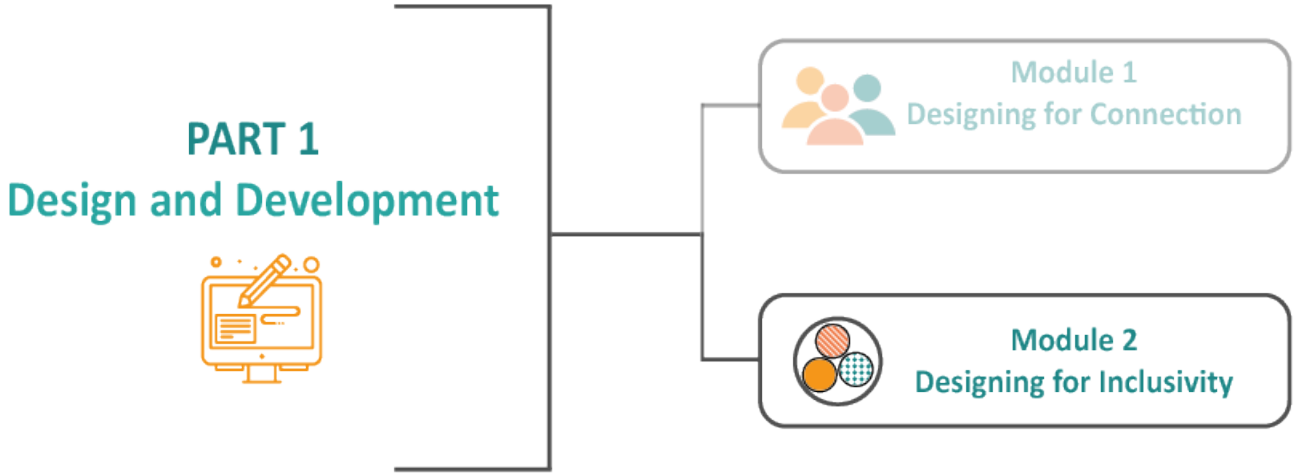
Yukselturk, E., & Top, E. (2006). Reconsidering online course discussions: A case study. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 34*(3), 341–367.

Zhang, P., Ding, L., and Mazur, E. (2017). Peer instruction in introductory physics: A method to bring about positive changes in students' attitudes and beliefs. *Phys. Rev. Phys. Educ. Res., 13*(1), 010104-1–010104-9. http://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.13.010104

MODULE 2: DESIGNING FOR INCLUSIVITY

2.1 Module overview



University of Waterloo

Learning outcomes

What you can take away from this module

- **Confidence** in understanding and applying **key principles of equity and inclusivity** to humanize virtual learning design.
- The ability to **critically reflect on your own positionality** in the context of social justice principles and how they impact virtual teaching and learning contexts.
- Capacity to apply the principles of **universal design for learning (UDL)** to **proactively ensure** all learners can access and use your materials and **decrease the need for reactive accommodations**.
- **Comfort with holistic well-being principles** and capacity to make **thoughtful design choices** to help facilitate positive learner mental health in virtual contexts.
- **Acknowledge and understand your responsibilities** as an educator to the **TRC Calls to Action** and identify strategies for **appropriately incorporating principles of Indigenization** or decolonization into your course design, content, activities, and/or assessment design.

This module will provide an introduction to core principles of equitable, inclusive, and sensitive teaching and learning design in virtual contexts. It will also explore some initial considerations for decolonizing or Indigenizing your virtual course. Principles are paired with practical and applied strategies and examples to help you apply these concepts in the design (or redesign) of your own virtual courses.

Sections in this module

You can jump to any of the sections in this module by clicking the links below or using the left-side navigation menu.

Strategies in action examples

Below are links to strategies, examples, instructor testimonials, and templates for those who would like to jump right to exploring humanizing principles and strategies in action and applied in real virtual courses.

2.2 Equity and inclusivity in virtual learning

- Strategies in action: How to mitigate unconscious bias

2.3 Social justice in virtual learning contexts

- Strategies in action: Power flower exemplar
- Strategies in action: Remind yourself and learners of your social justice commitments
- Strategies in action: Social justice reading list, resource, and image audit
- Strategies in action: Create space for learners to talk about and act on issues of social justice

2.4 Universal design for learning and equitable access to online content

- Strategies in action: Multiple means of representation
- Strategies in action: Multiple means of action and expression
- Strategies in action: Multiple means of engagement

2.5 Learner mental health and wellness in virtual courses

- Strategies in action: Designing virtual learning experiences to promote wellbeing
- Strategies in action: Promote course and institutional supports in your course LMS
- Strategies in action: Managing student workload
- Strategies in action: Addressing sensitive topics

2.6 The road to decolonizing and Indigenizing a virtual course

- Strategies in action: Acknowledging our positionality and the approach to this work
- Strategies in action: Using holistic frameworks for learning
- Strategies in action: Assessments aligned with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning
- Strategies in action: Connecting to the land in virtual spaces

Reflect and apply activities

Reflect and apply

Below are links to all the Reflect and Apply activities for those interested in diving right into applying principles and examples to their own course design and teaching context.

2.2 Equity and inclusivity in virtual learning

- Getting to know yourself and your course

2.3 Social justice in virtual learning contexts

- Your own power flower

2.4 Universal design for learning and equitable access to online content

- Setting three UDL goals for your course design

2.5 Learner mental health and wellness in virtual courses

- Mental health literacy self-assessment
- Understanding institutional supports for learner well-being

2.6 The road to decolonizing and Indigenizing a virtual course

- Stop and reflect on the TRC Calls to Action

Going deeper resources

Going deeper

Below are links to additional resources on various topics for those interested in learning more about a particular topic.

2.2 Equity and inclusivity in virtual learning

- Equity & Inclusion Glossary of Terms: University of British Columbia
- *Removing Barriers to Online Learning Through a Teaching and Learning Lens* (PDF, p. 5)
- Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary
- EDI Style Guide: Faculty of Health Sciences, Queen's University
- If you are interested in further exploring #the4thBox, see the Centre for Story-base Strategy's *Why we need to step into #the4thbox* free digital resources.

2.3 Social justice in virtual learning contexts

- **Power flower extension resources:**
  - The Wheel of Privilege, developed by the Intertwine Charter
- **Racial oppression resources:**
  - Robin DiAngelo: White Fragility (Video length ~11 min)
  - Ibram X. Kendi: The difference between being "not racist" and anti-racist (Video length ~52 min)
  - Peggy McIntosh: Unpacking the invisible knapsack of white privilege
- **Ethnicity and xenophobia resources:**
  - Jaela Bernstien: 'We have fewer rights': Franco-Ontarian youth protest by living proudly
- **Language justice resources:**
  - Jamila Lyiscott: Language, race and power (Video length ~ 3 min)
- **Religious oppression resources:**
  - Asma Ahmed: Islamophobia in Schools
- **Family status resources:**
  - Tricia M. van Rhijn: A profile of undergraduate student parents in Canada (PDF)
- **Social class/socioeconomic status resources:**
  - Sheldon Levy, Why student aid is important in levelling the playing field (Video length ~ 4 min | Transcript)
- **Education equity resources:**
  - Dan Cantiller, Many paths forward: Strategies for improving post-secondary education outcomes of Indigenous learners in Canada
- **Ability/disability resources:**
  - Greta Anderson: Accessibility suffers during pandemic
- **Sex assigned at birth resources:**
  - Race and gender bias in online courses
  - Making Black women scientists under White empiricism: The racialization of epistemology in physics
- **Gender identity and expression resources:**
  - Lee Airton on how we all participate in gender policing, and how we can stop (Video length ~ 5 min)
  - The No Big Deal Campaign website and They is My Pronoun blog [now archived] are resources created by Lee Airton (Faculty of Education, Queen's University) for gender affirmation through respectful pronoun use.
  - Paul Gessell: Universities for all genders
- **Sexuality resources:**
  - GLSEN: Supporting LGBTQ+ Learners of Colour (PDF)
  - MacEwan University Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity: Let's talk about being an ally! (PDF)

2.4 Universal design for learning and equitable access to online content

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- What is the AODA?
- AODA Requirement for Educational Institutions
- AODA Education Standards
- National Centre on Accessible Educational Materials: Designing for Accessibility with POUR
  - Perceivable: Present information in multiple ways
  - Operable: Provide options for navigation

    - Understandable: Create an intuitive experience
    - Robust: Ensure compatibility
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
- OER Accessibility Toolkit
- Accessibility Tools and Resources

2.5 Learner mental health and wellness in virtual courses

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada hosts a training program called Mental Health First Aid
- Mental Health Commission of Canada Continuum Self Check
- Food insecurity and mental health (PDF)
- Teaching practices that promote student wellbeing (PDF)
- We have an obligation to design courses for the time students have
- Rice University, Center for Teaching Excellence: Course Workload Estimator
- Online micro-learning can transform the teaching of sensitive topics
- Teaching and learning sensitive topics

2.6 The road to decolonizing and Indigenizing a virtual course

- **Indigenous history on Turtle island resources:**
    - Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada
    - Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports
    - National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation About NCTR
    - Qikiqtani Truth Commission Key Findings
    - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)
    - Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada
    - What reconciliation is and what it is not
- **National Indigenous leadership groups:**
    - Assembly of First Nations
    - Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
    - Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
    - Métis National Council
    - Native Women's Association of Canada
- **Recommended multimedia resources:**
    - Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
    - Eagle Feather News
    - CBC Indigenous
    - Indigenous Cinema
    - imagineNative
- **For deeper understanding of preferred terminology:**
    - Communicating Positively: A Guide on Terminology (Trent University)
    - Indigenous Peoples terminology guidelines for usage (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.)
    - Briefing Note on Terminology (University of Manitoba)
    - Terminology Guide (Queen's University)
    - Indigenous Terminology Guide (PDF, University of Waterloo)
    - Use these culturally offensive phrases, questions at your own risk (Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc.)
- **Indigenization of the academy:**

    - Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy
    - Decolonization is not a metaphor
    - It's not my job to teach you about Indigenous People
    - Want to reach out to an Indigenous scholar? Awesome! But first, here are 10 things to consider
- **Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers:**
    - Learning from mistakes
    - Integrating Indigenous Epistemologies and Pedagogies into Curriculum Design and Development
- **Faculty perspectives, approaches, and strategies for Indigenization and decolonization of courses:**
    - What I Learned in Class Today: Faculty Perspectives
    - 100 ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing academic programs
    - Indigenous initiatives in engineering education in Canada: Collective contributions
    - Decolonizing computing?
- **Indigenization Guides (BCcampus)**
    - Foundations
    - Teachers and Instructors
    - Front Line Staff, Advisors, and Student Services
    - Leaders and Administrators
    - Curriculum Developers
    - Researchers
    - Access through eCampus Ontario catalogue

2.2 Equity and inclusivity in virtual learning

Key principles: Inclusive course design factors

In Module 1 Designing For Connection, you explored the core components that assist in creating a humanized learning experience beginning with understanding your learners and your own experiences of learning in order to appreciate the joys and vulnerabilities of learning and growing. You also learned about **six dimensions of significant learning** and **three types of connections** and interactions that can foster deeper engagement in learning online (see section 1.3. Setting the Stage for Significant and Courageous Learning). Though these all represent humanizing aspects of virtual teaching and learning, it can still be challenging to understand the different dimensions of learners and how the virtual learning space can be designed to be made **more welcoming**, **inclusive**, and **equitable**.

Inclusive course design takes on many forms, but pertains to course design factors such as:

Instructor identity and mindset

- Acknowledging your identity as an instructor and how that influences the learning environment.

- Seeking to identify and mitigate the ways that systemic inequalities operate in teaching and learning spaces, affect individuals' experiences of education, and influence course and curriculum design.

Course atmosphere

- Intentionally cultivating an environment in which all learners are treated fairly, have equal access to learning, feel welcome, valued, challenged, and supported in succeeding academically.

Course materials and resources

- Incorporating materials, resources, and approaches that attend to learners' different socio-cultural identities and backgrounds.

Assessment

- Purposefully designing, teaching, and assessing in a manner that is contextual, engaging, meaningful, and accessible to all.
- Using varied means of assessment to promote learners academic success and well-being.

These are overlapping concepts, but we will focus in on these elements in this, and upcoming, sections of the module. More specifically,

- this section will focus on developing a **foundational language for equity, diversity, and inclusion** topics and look inward and reflect on ourselves as instructors or course designers;
- section 2.3 will discuss elements of **identity and social justice** in virtual learning contexts;
- section 2.4 will consider **universal design for learning** and ensuring equitable access to online content;
- section 2.5 will explore how to attend to learners' **mental health and wellness** in virtual courses; and
- section 2.6 will introduce some steps to begin to **decolonize and Indigenize** a virtual course.

Quick tips and tricks: Inclusivity as part of significant learning

This module may introduce you to many new concepts, ideas, or perspectives you may have not considered before. However, don't feel overwhelmed.

It should be emphasized that the principles of humanizing learning, including the course design considerations you have already taken in Module 1 with the six dimensions of significant learning (Fink's taxonomy: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning to learn) do set you up for success for inclusive course design!

This module will simply outline different contexts, situations, ideas, and strategies that can help you action the foundations of humanized learning design and help you understand and action what it looks like in a virtual setting.

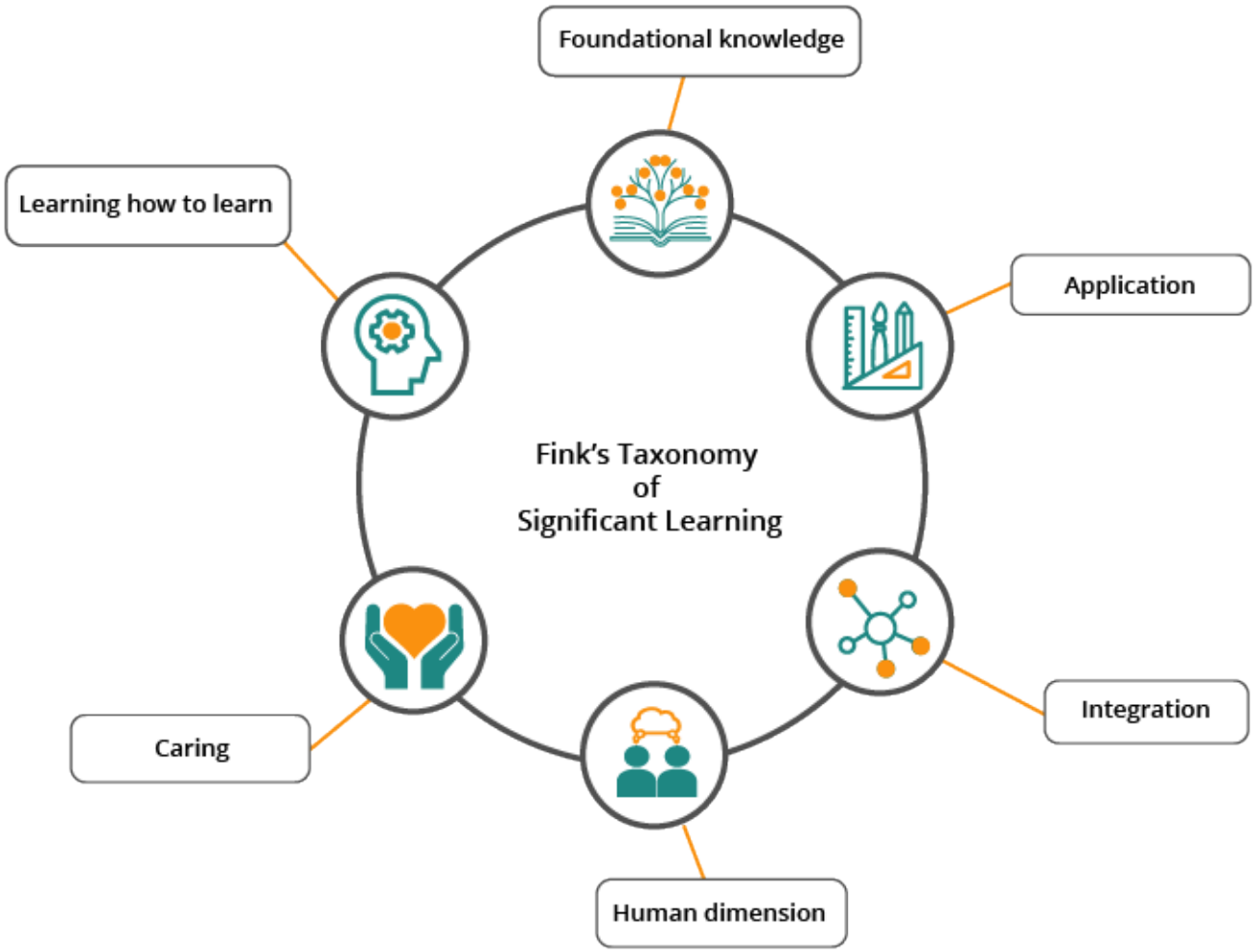


Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

Key principles: Understanding the language of inclusion

It is important to note that **terminology and definitions are always evolving** as society grapples with these complex ideas, so we encourage you to approach this as a **life-long learning** pursuit towards more inclusive teaching. Different institutions, communities, and academic disciplines may use varying language to describe the same or similar concepts related to equity, diversity, Indigenization, decolonization, inclusion, and related ideas—and sometimes choices of language can be politically contentious.

In this course, we are focused less on the "right" label for a given concept and more on the positive social justice outcomes that can result from humanizing learning.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are common terms used today to frame an intentionally comprehensive approach to a particular goal. In our context, it is equity, diversity, and inclusion in virtual learning.

Consider the following words and our operational definitions.

University of Waterloo

"Equity" icon by Bruno Castro, from the Noun Project. Used under a CC BY 3.0 license.

Equity:

Defined as the removal of systemic barriers and biases (e.g., policies, processes, outcomes), enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from resources and opportunities. It is important to note that equity does not mean 'the same', rather it means accounting for barriers that exist for certain groups for historically or currently underrepresented or marginalized groups and putting in place measures to address and/or remove these barriers.

"Diversity" icon by Cara Foster, from the Noun Project. Used under a CC BY 3.0 license.

Diversity:

Defined as the differences in lived experiences and perspectives of people and is meant to convey the existence of and respect for difference. These differences can be positive or negative but can only be created when people come together, and everyone is included. Equity is often considered before diversity, as diversity without equity cannot challenge systemic barriers.

"Inclusion" icon by Lars Meiertoberens, from the Noun Project. Used under a CC BY 3.0 license.

Inclusion:

The active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege and build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities for all to flourish.

You may have started to see acronyms such as **EDDI** ("equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion") and **EDII** ("equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigeneity") used across organizations. These acronyms differ a bit in meaning, but the general intention is to acknowledge the distinct histories, contexts, and frames of reference between **inclusion** (historically used to advance the rights of the disability community) and **Indigenization/ decolonization** (used to recognize the ongoing national conversation about reconciliation in Canada). Another variation, **EDIIA** (equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigeneity, and accessibility), re-emphasizes the **accessibility of learning materials**, an important consideration for the online space for all learners.

Definitions

Decolonization: is the removal or undoing of colonial elements, while Indigenization can be seen as the addition or redoing of Indigenous elements.

Indigenization: involves going beyond tokenism or gestures of recognition to meaningfully change practices and structures. You will explore this idea further in section 2.6. The Road to Decolonizing and Indigenizing a Virtual Course.

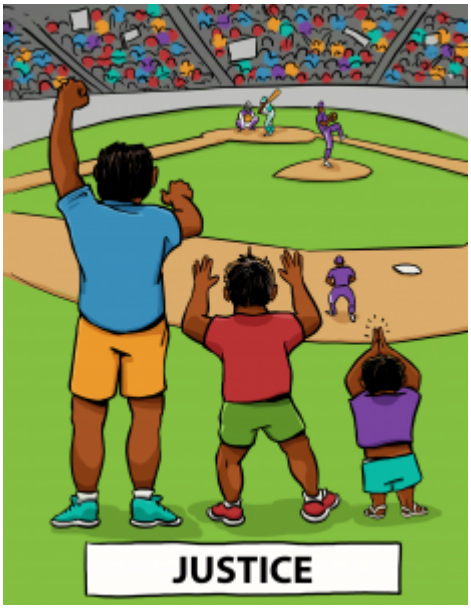
A visual representation of EDDI concepts

Consider the following graphic, which can help you begin to appreciate how these ideas might be actioned in the real world before we delve into these ideas specifically for virtual teaching and learning. You may be familiar with the original image that has been circulating on the internet for some time that was originally created in 2012 by Craig Foehle (see his article "The Evolution of an Accidental Meme"). In this metaphor, we consider three different spectators who wish to watch a baseball game from behind a fence.

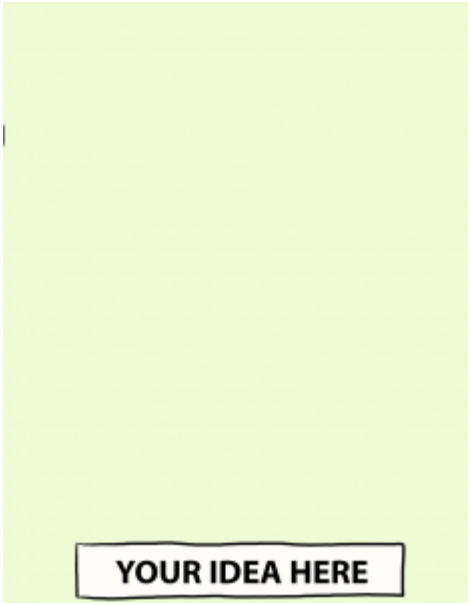
In this panel, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports, that is, everyone receives a crate to see over the fence regardless of their height. They are being treated **equally** (with sameness). However, this can only work with everyone starting in the same place; in this example, equality only works if everyone is the same height.

In this panel, individuals are given different supports (e.g., different numbers of crates) to make it possible for them to have equal access in viewing the game over the fence. The same resources are being used as before, but here they have simply been reallocated. They are being treated **equitably** (with fairness). Sometimes differences and/or history can create barriers to participation, thus equity must be addressed first, before being able to achieve equality.

In this panel, all three spectators can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed and there is **justice**.



These metaphorical images are helpful to get us thinking about these concepts in different ways. However, the conversation regarding equality, equity, and justice doesn't end here. This is why we need to think about #the4thBox to explore how narrative assumptions often hide in plain sight. One consideration might be, as offered by the Centre for Story-based Strategy: "Does the third panel really come after the second? Wasn't the third box really first, before the fence was built?" (Centre for Story-based Strategy, 2016). What would a decolonizing lens on this metaphor look like? A blank panel offers us space for more exploration in this and many other areas.



Credit: These panels are an original remix of the #the4thBox Equality/Equity/Justice image, a collaboration between Centre for Story-based Strategy & Interaction Institute for Social Change; Artist: Angus Maguire | Image Description(PDF)

Going deeper

You may find the presented glossaries useful to become more comfortable with certain EDI-related terminology.

It is ok to feel unsure about proper usage; as long as you are humble and open to asking questions and receiving answers, most people are happy to clarify for you what a term means to them and how it should be used. Section 2.3. Social justice in virtual learning contexts will also delve deeper into these areas.

- Equity & Inclusion Glossary of Terms: University of British Columbia
- Some useful definitions in Removing Barriers to Online Learning Through a Teaching and Learning Lens (PDF, p. 5)
- Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary
- EDI Style Guide: Faculty of Health Sciences, Queen's University

If you are interested in further exploring #the4thBox, see the Centre for Story-base Strategy's Why we need to step into #the4thbox free digital resources.

Key principles: Acknowledging unconscious bias and our roles as educators

A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.
(Kenneth Burke, 1935)

People are psychologically predisposed, to a certain extent, to prefer people who look like us, sound like us, and share our interests (Hamlin, Mahajan, Liberman & Wynn, 2013). This in-group favouritism starts to appear at a young age (~5 years), as children develop social cognition (Abound, 2003) and are reinforced by the attitudes held by adults in their perceived in-group (Bennett et al., 2004). There are several different developmental and social factors that lead to and re-enforce our implicit social biases and in-group favouritism (Aboud & Amato, 2001), which are sometimes operating below the threshold of our awareness and contributing to implicit stereotyping and prejudice (Amodio & Devine, 2006), which together form our **unconscious biases**.

While the seed of these biases may start early in our development and influence our thoughts and actions pre-consciously, that **does not mean we do not have any control over these biases or how they influence our attributions, decisions, and actions** (Blair, 2002). There are many psychological and biological processes/urges that happen unconsciously, but we have conscious control over, such as the breath, or how we behave on hunger. **We can choose to become aware of these biases** through reflection, education, and exposure to more inclusive social norms (Rudman et al., 2001; Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Sidanius et al., 2006), exposure to individuals and groups who may differ from us (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Page-Gould et al., 2008), and practicing responding in unbiased/non-stereotypical ways (Kawakami et al., 2000; Blair et al., 2001).

In this section of this module, we'll ask you to reflect on ***who you are as an instructor*** to help uncover some of your own unconscious biases as they relate to your teaching.

We all have a "way of seeing" that is rooted in our own experiences and background, and we bring unconscious biases to our work as instructors. **Unconscious bias** can have unintended effects on learners in a virtual course, as much of what you convey is done in an asynchronous fashion (e.g., through your course outline, video/audio recordings, written text, asynchronous facilitation, etc.) and at times tone or wording can become ambiguous, or learners cannot ask you right away for clarification. Further, your biases may manifest through your selection/curation of course content and assessment design (e.g., what you did and didn't choose

as a required reading, which perspectives or knowledges are privileged over others in your course, what you consider to be acceptable formats to submit for assessment, etc.).

Oftentimes, instructors model new teaching spaces according to their own experiences with (virtual) education and it becomes difficult to envision (virtual) learning in a different way. By becoming aware of our past experiences and thinking about how our unconscious biases affect our teaching and interactions with learners, we can take steps to use more inclusive language and teaching approaches, encourage a more empathetic approach to communication, and promote vocabulary and terminology that respects and values the diversity of the Canadian and global community; a more humanized experience.

This module will focus specifically on exploring different ways of designing your content for your virtual course to broaden your understanding of various intersecting concepts that will allow learners to be included and engaged in all aspects of your course.

Strategies in action: How to mitigate unconscious bias

As a first step, unconscious bias can be interrupted by **critical self-reflection** and strategies such as:

- **considering the opposite** – take a mental pause by considering evidence supporting the opposite conclusion;
- **common identity formation** – reflect on points of common identity between you and the other; this common ground can help reduce any negative implicit bias you may have towards them;
- **counter stereotypical examples** – focus on individuals you admire and respect who are in the same demographic as the person you are directly interacting with/thinking about; and,
- **perspective-taking** – intentionally empathize with the other and take a moment to visualize their life and what they have gone through leading up to this encounter and what their life will be like afterwards.

Key principles: Reflective and reflexive practice

Throughout Module 1, and as will continue throughout the course, you have engaged with 'Reflect and Apply' activities, which challenge you to think about yourself or the learning you have done, and apply it to your course design and delivery. Most of these activities are focused on professional **reflection** which is an extremely useful and important exercise. For this module, you may find yourself moving at times into **reflexive practice** given the subject matter. This adds another dimension to your thinking and actions.

Consider the two definitions:

Definitions

Reflective practice is the capacity to reflect on action in order to engage in a process of continuous learning and growth. Reflective practice is a process by which you

- pause and think about your practice,
- consciously analyze your decision making, and
- draw on theory, experience, or other learning to relate it to what you did (or didn't do) in practice.

Reflexive practice is finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions, in order to better understand our complex roles in relation to others. To be

reflexive is to recognize we are active in shaping our surroundings and begin to critically analyze circumstances and relationships rather than merely reacting to them. This process helps review and revise ethical ways of being and relating in our world.

Credit: Allen, W. – Learning for Sustainability

Reflect and apply: Getting to know yourself and your course

In section 1.2. Virtual Learning Contexts and Virtual Learners, you were asked to consider your learners before beginning to think about designing your course. Now, take a moment to reflect on yourself as an instructor in your field, and also as an instructor in the online space.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page, refresh the page, or hit the back button). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2801#h5p-37

Hopefully, this exercise provided you with the opportunity to engage in some deep reflections about assumptions related to your course and your perspectives as an educator. In the next sections, we will explore these ideas more deeply and apply course design strategies so that we can make space for all our learners to feel welcome and help them feel included and engaged in our virtual learning spaces.

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2.3 Social justice in virtual learning contexts

Key principles: Seeing identity and frames of social justice

Educationalist Parker J. Palmer (1998) posits that as designers and instructors of post-secondary education (PSE) experiences we cannot help but "teach who we are" (p. 2).

> If students and subjects accounted for all the complexities of teaching, our standard ways of coping would do—keep up with our fields as best we can and learn enough techniques to stay ahead of the student psyche. But there is another reason for these complexities: we teach who we are.
>
> (Palmer, 1997)

Working from Palmer's assertion, it stands that where EDDI interfaces with issues of social justice and virtual teaching and learning, it is important that virtual learning designers have the **capacity** to and **make time for self-reflection on their own positioning** in relation to an ever-developing range of social justice frames and identities because those personal and professional positionings cannot help but become part of their course designs.

Parker J. Palmer (Palmer, n.d.)

Definitions

Identities: groups or broad communities with which individuals might self-identify. For instance, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, Indigenous Peoples, environmental activists, cisgender women, or White men.

The last two examples are identities that generally experience privilege on one or more of the listed identities; these are legitimate identities that often become invisible as a result of the privilege that they experience.

Frames of social justice: social justice issues that have some degree of objective criteria for establishing membership, like socioeconomic status, older adults, or level of education (no high school diploma, high school graduate, advanced degree-holder, etc.). Individuals may or may not self-identify with a social justice frame, even if they fit the objective framing criteria.

In this section, we will engage with an exercise that helps us to reflect on our own social justice positioning relative to privilege and oppression so that we might develop some insight into how this manifests in the learning experiences that we design and deliver. Then, we will offer a high-level overview of a number of important social justice frames and identities, and look at how those aspects of social life intersect in complex ways. Finally, we'll explore some practical strategies for humanizing learning across the range of social justice identities and frames.

Key principles: Understanding privilege and oppression

As designers of online courses, postsecondary faculty and academic support unit (ASU) staff hold positions of privilege within their professional context. **As decision-makers about course content and structure, faculty and ASU staff exercise power as they make choices about how learners will experience virtual learning**

environments, and that power can have a significant "ripple effect" into all aspects of a learner's life—emotional, social, financial, political, etc. While some people may experience a sense of discomfort or even shame associated with the suggestion that they occupy a privileged position, an important first step in humanizing learning experiences involves **acknowledging the multiple and dynamic ways that educators experience both privilege and its opposite: oppression**.

Acknowledging and naming privilege and oppression allows for the development of awareness of the kinds of ways that being privileged/oppressed impacts life experiences both broadly, and in the specific context of formal education. This acknowledging and naming is also a keystone aspect of both social justice and humanizing learning.

Note

The word oppression can seem strange in our contemporary society, as for many people it holds connotations of obvious, visible cruelty, or mistreatment. In modern western societies, however, the nature of oppression has shifted such that oppression functions structurally, meaning that people experience oppression as they interact with social systems (like education, social services, financial institutions, healthcare agencies, etc.) in ways that may not be obvious to other people who are not experiencing oppression, or not experiencing it in the same way or to the same degree.

By being more aware of their position within a social field of privilege and oppression, a course designer is in a position to leverage the privilege associated with their professional responsibility for course design. Through the process of course design they can make choices that help to break down status-quo aspects of privilege and oppression in their courses, and foster greater equity through taking steps to humanize learning in their virtual course.

Key principle: Social justice self-reflection – The power flower

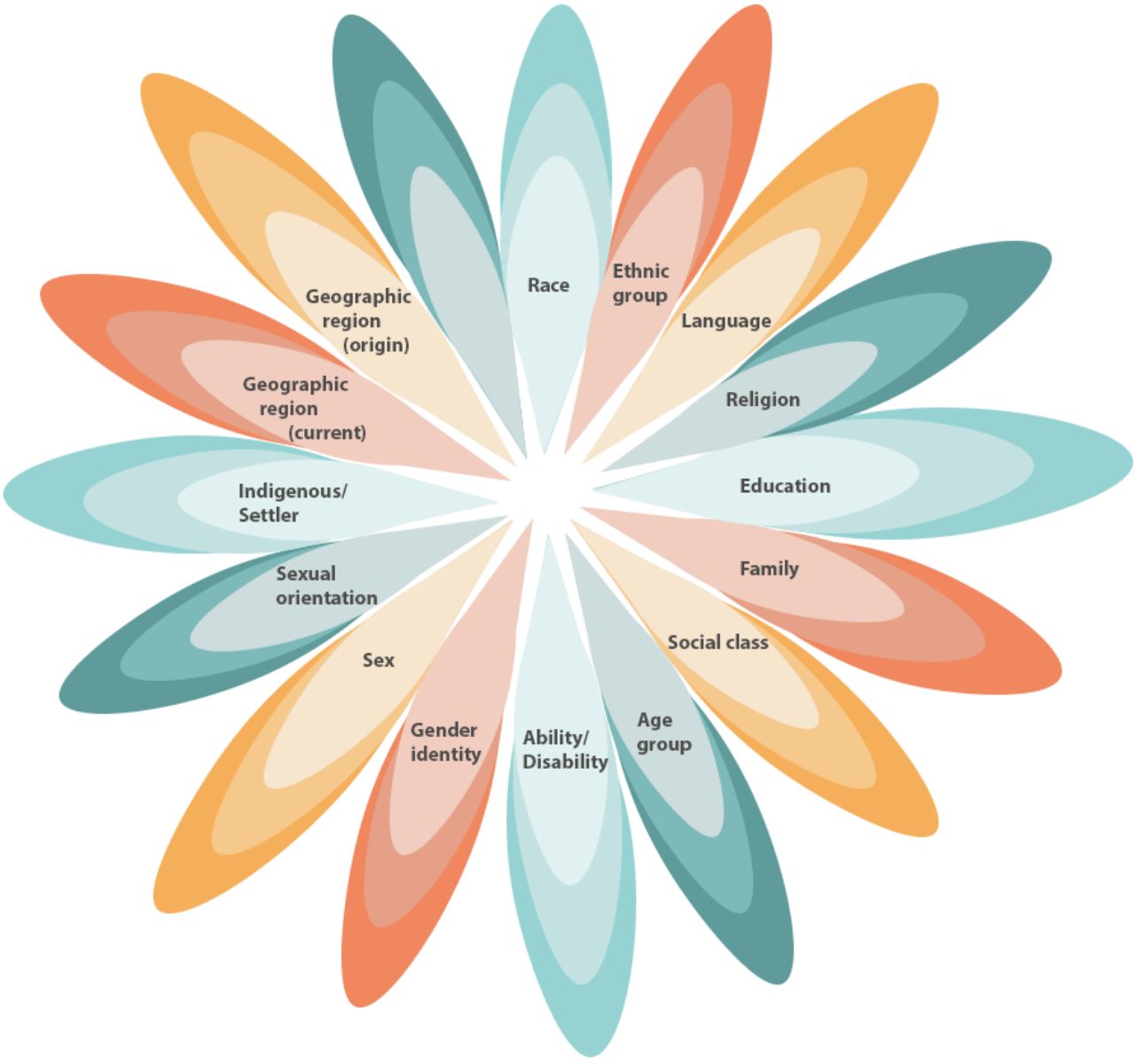
Self-assessment of privilege and oppression is a critical skill for course designers who aim to design courses that are responsive to social justice considerations. By **self-assessment**, we mean the ability to take inventory of the many ways that one experiences privilege or oppression in their own personal and professional life, in order to better understand how that privilege, through knowledge assumptions and other biases, may inadvertently be transferred into the design of online learning experiences.

One exercise for undertaking an inventory of personal and professional privilege is ***the power flower*** (Arnold et al., 1991). Designed in the early 1990s by a group of social justice educators, this activity asks participants to consider their own positioning relative to the dominant group across a range of social justice categories. By dominant group, we mean the social and/or cultural group that holds and maintains social and economic decision-making authority in a society or community.

Categories of social identities and frames include the following:

- race
- ethnic group
- language
- religion
- education
- family
- social class
- age group
- ability/disability

- gender identity
- sex
- sexual orientation
- indigenous/settler
- geographic region (current)
- geographic region (origin)
- a blank space left for the user to insert any categories that are relevant to their identity, but that weren't considered by the activity developers



The power flower
Credit: Adapted from Albert, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas (1991), and Lee (1985).

To use the power flower, consider each element of social justice identity, and on the outside flower petal,

indicate the nature of the dominant social group for this category (for example, in the category of race, White is likely to be the dominant group). Then, on the inside flower petal, indicate your personal identification for the given category. It may be helpful to colour code dominant and non-dominant group status to give visual power to the exercise.

It is important to remember when completing the power flower that on any given petal of the flower, a match or mismatch between one's interpretation of the dominant group and one's own positioning doesn't necessarily indicate the de facto existence of oppression; **an individual must reflect on their own experience to determine if they experience oppression**.

Strategies in action: Power flower exemplar

To provide a concrete example of social justice self-assessment, one of the module co-authors, Blair Niblett, (Associate Professor, Trent University) offers his own completed self-assessment as an exemplar. After reviewing his completed power flower, Blair offered his reflection. Click the quote icon below to view his reflection.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2712#h5p-30*

As we can see from this exemplar, the simple exercise that is the power flower can be powerful and complex in terms of its capacity for enabling reflection on experiences of privilege and oppression.

Reflect and apply: Your own power flower

Using the downloadable power-flower template file (.docx or .pdf, so you can work offline on your computer or on paper), Power-Flower Activity (DOCX), consider your own identity in relation to the dominant group for each social justice category.

Guidance:

- Try not to rush through this exercise.
- Take time to think carefully about who you are as a person and an educator, where you come from (socially and geographically), and how you relate with the dominant group on each category of the flower diagram. This might be informed by your own experiences of disadvantage or exclusion related to social identities or social justice frames identified on the power flower, or not.
- It is perfectly fine if there are some aspects of social identity that you're not sure how to complete. Simply fill in your best understanding of a dominant group, and your own identity for that aspect. You may choose to come back to this activity and update your thinking about dominant groups and your own positioning as you move through the module, or the rest of this course.

You will note that you are able to fill in a dominant group for each flower petal. While as course designers we could have filled this into the template, we have opted not to do so for two reasons.

- First, acknowledging and naming a dominant group is an important part of the exercise that we want

learners to participate in.

- Second, some of the social identity petals have dominant groups that are regionally contextual, meaning that people in some places would reasonably choose a different dominant group.
- Beware of "reverse" oppression. If you are a dominant group member, it may be the case that you have experienced discrimination at some point in your life related to your dominant group membership. While any level of discrimination may have led to negative impacts or bad feelings for you, this kind of exclusion is not considered oppressive because it is not backed by a historical or pervasive power imbalance, as is the case for oppressed groups (e.g., racialized people, 2SLGBTQ+ people, women, etc.) (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Download the Power-Flower Activity (DOCX).

Now that you have completed the power flower exercise, reflect on your experience of the exercise, and answer the two questions in the interaction below.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

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3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

Note: Social justice, as a part of humanizing learning, requires a lot of reflection on identity that can be intimate and personal. You may also leave these fields blank and record your responses elsewhere on your own device, or in your own offline journal or notebook.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2712#h5p-32

Going deeper

The Wheel of Privilege, developed by the Intertwine Charter, offers a similar model to the power flower, but with additional categories and some greater emphasis on the intersectionality between social justice identities and frames (intersectionality is a concept we will explore further later in this module).

Why a flower?

You may wonder about the significance of the symbol of the flower in this exercise.

While the original designers of the activity were not explicit on why a flower was chosen, we posit three valuable reasons that the flower is a useful metaphor:

- The arrangement of **interior and exterior petals** in the flower illustrate that **individuals exist within social systems** that are controlled by a **dominant social group** (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).
- The **circular arrangement** of the petals representing aspects of social identity means that the list of aspects is **not hierarchical**. This is important because a simple listing might convey an order of importance among markers like race, social class, and age group. Such an arrangement is not appropriate in the abstract; only an individual can decide the relative importance of each social identity in their own life.
- The **arrangement of petals around a central point** shows that each of the social identities exists **in relation** to the other aspects of identity. In other words, each aspect is not fully independent, but rather intricately connected to the other aspects also connected to the central hub of individual identity. This last point is a description of a concept often called **intersectionality**, (Crenshaw, 1989) which has become a popular term to describe the complexity of occupying multiple social identities that fall outside the dominant group for that aspect of social identity.

Key principles: Understanding intersectionality

As we noted above, the power flower is elegant in its design because it conveys a non-hierarchical and inter-related construct of multiple identities of privilege and oppression that any individual might subscribe to. A foundational concept for understanding this dynamic arrangement is Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of Intersectionality.

Definitions

Intersectionality: a concept developed by Black, feminist, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to explain a compounding or multiplying effect experienced by people who occupy more than one identity or frame of oppression. In Crenshaw's (2017) own words: "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things."

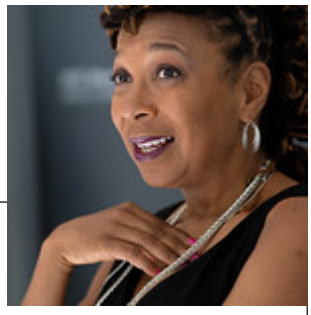
In Crenshaw's analysis, the multiple-burden is generally being both Black and a woman, though Crenshaw and others have expanded the notion of intersectionality to include the full range of identities explored here.

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that doesn't take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework has been used as a basis for translating 'women's experience' or 'the Black experience' into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.

(Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140)

In the following video segment, Crenshaw illustrates the concept of intersectionality in clear terms. Also, pay attention to her articulation of the relationship between intersectionality and the context of multiple identities that are rooted in history and in the context of community.

Kimberlé Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality? (Video length ~ 2 min)



Crenshaw (Mohamed, 2018)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2712#oembed-1

Transcript for Kimberlé Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality? available on YouTube.

Key principles: Aspects and intersections of social identity

Thus far, we have asked you to consider the aspects of social identity without providing any specific information about each one. Many adults have an implicit understanding of various social identities because we have inhabited and encountered them all our lives. However, especially for those who identify as members of a dominant group, it is possible for social identities to be an invisible aspect of our existence. Therefore, it can be helpful to have an explicit understanding of what each one is.

In this course, there isn't time or space to explore each of the aspects of social identity with any depth; in fact, each aspect could take up an entire course of its own! Still, humanizing online learning calls on educational designers to have a basic working understanding of social identity aspects by which people might experience privilege or oppression.

Here we will offer a quick look at each of the aspects identified in the power flower. For each of the frames or identities, we'll also name the 'ism' or kind of oppression that emerges in relation to the aspect of identity and offer some relevant information for that frame/identity within the context of post-secondary education (PSE).

Human dimension and caring

Knowledge of social identities and frames better enable virtual course design that responds to the human dimension and caring aspects of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning (see 1.3. Setting the Stage for Significant and Courageous Learning).

"hands and heart" icon by Eliricon and "Great Minds" by Blake Thompson, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Social identities, complexities, oppression, and the postsecondary context

In this **power flower** interactive, you have the opportunity to dive a little deeper into each of the petals (social identities) in the power flower.

You can click through each of the identities listed in the left-hand navigation or choose to focus on a few that are of most interest to you. Each social identity is defined, some of the complexities associated with it are explored, as are forms of oppression and specific relevance to the PSE context.

Within this power flower interactive, we offer many "Going deeper" resources to allow you to explore each concept of social identity and privilege/oppression more thoroughly. These possible areas for learning are an extension of this course but are not all required to achieve its learning outcomes. We suggest that you select one or two social identity categories for which to engage with the "Going deeper" resources, but you are welcome to explore as few or as many as you like based on time available to you.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2712#h5p-26

Strategies in action: Social identity and justice through virtual course interactions

To introduce strategies for designing online learning experiences that are responsive to social justice elements of EDDI, we return to Parker J. Palmer's (2017) assertion presented at the outset of this section that "**we teach who we are**."

An important extension of Palmer's missive is that while teaching strategies, engagement techniques, specialized resources, and innovative technologies may all play a role in designing high quality online learning experiences; designers and instructors are often too quick to reach for these kinds of external approaches for engaging learners and overcoming EDDI challenges, and too hesitant to look inward as an educator to overcome course design and implementation challenges through broader and deeper understandings of self across the range of social identities and frames that we have discussed above.

"reflection" icon by Tom Ingebretsen, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Following the logic of Palmer's "we teach who we are" assertion, the work that has been undertaken in this section—completing the flower of power exercise, and exploring some of the "going deeper" resources related to social justice ***is a strategy*** of paramount importance in forwarding EDDI objectives in PSE. Still, we appreciate that the identity clarification work that has been taken up in this section is perhaps a less practical a strategy than designers might need to begin taking immediate action toward humanizing online learning.

With that in mind, we offer a few ideas below for concrete actions to humanize online learning by addressing social justice, across the three primary interactions of online learning. Be aware, however, that **these strategies are likely to be more impactful in humanizing learning when used by a designer/educator who is working to develop self-awareness in relation to social justice privilege and oppression**.

Strategies in action: Remind yourself and learners of your social justice commitments

Credit: student by The Icon Z from thenounproject.com.; instructor by Ed Gray from thenounproject.com.

In Module 1, we introduced Michelle Pacansky-Brock's idea of a liquid syllabus, in which the instructor introduces themselves to learners in a more personal and less formal sense than is typically accomplished in the formal course syllabus. The liquid syllabus would be an excellent place to lay out commitments that you have to social justice principles. Consider situating your own identities of privilege and oppression, and commit to delivering the course in ways that promotes equity across all social injustices.

"student" icon by The Icon Z and "instructor" icon by Ed Gray, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Additionally, frame yourself as a learner in relation to social justice. Especially if you occupy identities of privilege, positioning yourself as open to ongoing learning about marginalized identities may help learners who experience marginalization to view you as an ally.

A note on being an ally

Allyship is a fraught concept in social justice circles. Even when a person of privilege does excellent work in supporting communities experiencing social injustice, we suggest caution in publicly naming oneself as an ally. Taking on that label often serves to benefit the person of privilege more than those who they are allied to. The role of ally is best acknowledged and assigned by individuals who experience marginalized identities and frames.

Strategies in action: Social justice reading list, resource, and image audit

Social justice reading list and resource audit

Historically, reading lists and resources used in PSE have largely been made up of texts and materials created by men (Harris et al., 2020). We hypothesize that this bias in reading lists likely extends to many other aspects of social justice (race, sexuality, etc.).

When designing or redesigning an online learning experience to humanize learning, conduct an audit of the reading list or other resources used to deliver the learning outcomes to determine what social identities are represented in the creators of the texts and resources used to deliver the course.

Ask yourself questions like:

"student" icon by The Icon Z and "content" by Shakeel Ch., from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

- Are there authors on my reading list who represent Black, Indigenous, and/or people of colour?
- Are there 2SLGBTQ+ authors represented?
- Authors who experience disability?

Then, seek out readings and resource materials authored by diverse scholars and/or professionals who represent various social justice frames and identities. Each text that is included in a course that presents work from an author who represents a marginalized social group **creates a potential opportunity for learners who occupy marginalized identities (racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, disabled, etc.) to see themselves in the course materials** from which they are learning. This possibility represents a significant step towards humanizing virtual learning.

Credit: This exercise is inspired by Dr. Denise Handlarski and Dr. Karleen Pendleton Jimenez, School of Education, Trent University.

Going deeper

To understand the type of audit process one might undertake when redesigning a course, Dr. Walker, provides her experience in undertaking a redevelopment of a traditional undergraduate Eurocentric music course into one that was more global and inclusive in its scope. Her redesign was underpinned by data from a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) project where Dr. Walker studied student perceptions of music and music history.

Showcase 2021: Remote Opportunity for Inclusive Music History (Video length ~ 12 min)

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2712#oembed-2*

Transcript for Showcase 2021: Remote Opportunity for Inclusive Music History is available on YouTube.

Social justice image audit

Following an audit of your reading list, repeat the same steps for images that are included in your virtual learning designs.

Do the images in your design

- show range across the gender spectrum?
- illustrate gender in ways that do not reinforce binary (male/female) gender stereotypes (unless the purpose is to intentionally question gender stereotypes)?
- include racialized individuals equitably, and in ways that do not perpetuate racial stereotypes?
- include people with disabilities and different types of disabilities (e.g., other than physical disability requiring a wheelchair)?
- avoid stereotypes representations of social roles or professions?
- consider what power dynamics are implied between individuals in an image and ensure they do not perpetuate stereotypes?

Strategies in action: Create space for learners to talk about and act on issues of social justice

Given the opportunity and a little bit of encouragement, most learners are excited to talk about social justice and their own experiences. Issues of social justice crosscut our lives, and so it should be possible to integrate social justice learning within the broader context of learning in an online course in any academic discipline. Blogs, discussion boards, wikis, and other interactive tools in your LMS may be ways to enable learner interactions around issues of social justice.

When designing these course elements,

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- **encourage inquiry through questioning**: Plan to begin a dialogue with a question rather than a statement of belief or position, as this may promote a more open exchange of ideas. Encouraging learners to pose questions "to the room," as opposed to a specific individual, may also promote collegial exchange and avoid putting specific individuals "on the spot" in virtual discussions;
- **encourage real-world action, even on a small scale**: Online dialogue around social justice can be

especially impactful if it is related to real-world actions that learners take in their own communities. If your course extends over weeks or months, consider adding (or modifying) an assignment such that learners are asked to identify a social justice issue that is important to them, observe that issue in their community, and design an intervention—even one that is tiny in scale or scope. Online dialogue can then become a check-in place for reporting back on developments, setbacks, or key learnings from their local community engagement. For an example, look back to the scaffolded assignments section in Module 1.4: Strategies in Action: Modelling and Inspiring Connections With Your Learners.

- **discourage debate that calls into question the existence or seriousness of social marginalization or oppression**: Framing debates about social justice can lead to denial of conditions of privilege and oppression that do not serve the aims of humanizing virtual learning; and
- **recognize that learner dialogue around issues of social justice requires close instructional team facilitation**: This is to ensure that the intention of inclusive learning is realized, and that oppressive conditions (sexism, homophobia, ableism, etc.) are not reinforced through learners' posts and replies. Of course, sexist, racist, or other oppressive comments could arise in any learner-learner interaction, but interactions related specifically to social justice may be more likely to give rise to intentional or unintentional comments that work against the aims of humanizing learning. In Module 4, we offer more comprehensive guidelines to serve as ground rules for virtual discussion, but it is important to think about this at the design phase to ensure you, TAs, or other instructors of your course will have the time and resources to engage in these discussions with your students.

In designing community action projects and course dialogues, faculty and ASU staff are not alone! Connect with staff in a teaching and learning centre or community-based learning centre at your institution for support and advice on successfully leveraging community action and dialogue to humanize learning.

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2.4 Universal design for learning and equitable access to online content

Key principles: Inclusive learning – A well-planned dinner party

Inclusive education theorist Mara Sapon-Shevin (2007) compares inclusive learning environments to that of a well-planned dinner party. When we plan a dinner party, we want guests to be able to enjoy tasty and nutritious food, as well as a positive social experience. Likewise, in creating inclusive virtual learning spaces, we want to create the opportunity for as many learners as possible to participate in interesting and engaging learning, which leverages the social and human components of learning.

University of Waterloo

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The success of both a dinner party and virtual course depends on careful planning from beginning to end

to ensure that the needs of each guest/learner are met, and no one is excluded. Because we typically plan dinner parties for our closest friends and family, we are quick to anticipate and respond to the unique needs of individual guests.

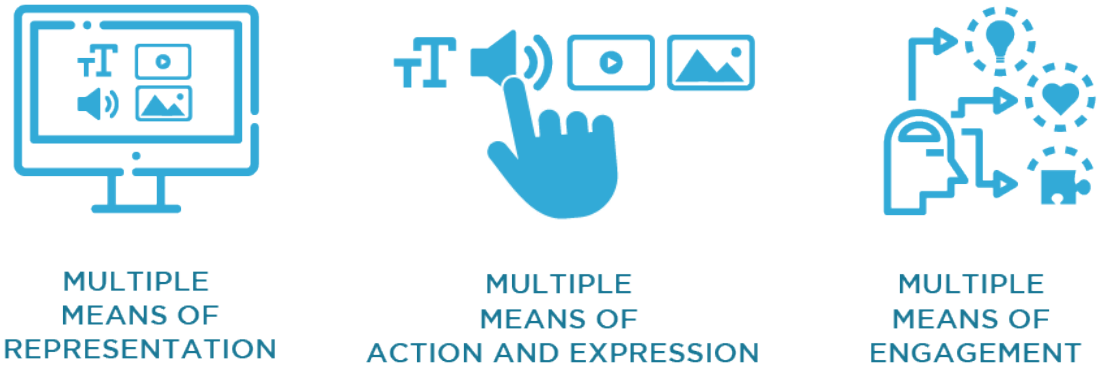
Conversely, because we plan virtual learning experiences for a broadly imagined "general public," it can be easy to overlook unique individual needs—especially for learners who experience a disability or a social frame or identity that is often excluded (either directly or systemically). Just as we would adapt for, or accommodate, our dinner party guests (e.g., provide an alternative meal for a lactose-intolerant guest, eliminate all nut products to welcome a guest with a serious allergy, or rearrange furniture to ensure access for a friend using a mobility aid), humanizing learning calls on us to design experiences in ways that facilitate access, engagement, and inclusion. **Universal design for learning is a framework for designing inclusive learning experiences that help ensure everyone feels welcome and is able to participate**.

Key principles: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

As explored in section 1.5. Learner–Content Connection: Designing Valuable Learning Experiences, UDL provides a framework for creating courses that are accessible for all learners, regardless of their disability status. UDL provides a

> [f]ramework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn … [and] offer[s] a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities.
>
> (CAST, 2018)

There are three key principles to keep in mind for UDL:



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Multiple means of representation

Provide multiple means of representation or present content and information in different ways. This is the "what" of learning.

This includes providing content that is accessible through different modalities, such as ensuring that text information can be accessed through screen reading software but the size of the text can also be adjusted, or that multimedia (audio and video) has accompanying captions and transcripts. This makes it **perceptible**.

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Multiple means of representation also means clarifying vocabulary, symbols, taxonomies, equations, etc., describing content in different ways, and using summary graphics, activities, videos, or multiple examples for the same topic to increase **clarity and comprehensibility** across all learners.

Finally, proper design and presentation of the information can provide the **necessary scaffolds to ensure that all learners have access to knowledge**. This can be achieved by activating or providing background knowledge to help build connections to prior understandings and experiences as well as highlighting patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships and relating them to the learning goal. Meaning-making can also be enhanced through models, scaffolds, and feedback, while reinforcement can be achieved by applying information to new contexts.

Multiple means of representation create expert learners who are **resourceful and knowledgeable**.

Multiple means of action and expression

Provide multiple means of action and expression or allow learners to express what they know in different ways. This is the "how" of learning.

Ensuring that your material is accessible through assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers) is one way that your learners can have multiple means of action to access your content. However, don't feel overwhelmed with this point; offering multiple modalities in your communication of concepts, as described in the multiple means of representation section is a strong way to support this arm of UDL. In addition, connecting with your institution's accessibility office can offer you support in this area as well as your learners, who may require specific services (e.g., paying for software for learners' computers or having course content converted to braille).

"choice" icon by Dong Ik Seo, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Providing a variety of activities and assessments in the course, with different ways of communicating knowledge (e.g., allowing learners to create either an essay, podcast, or video presentation) can also provide learners with the ability to find the **best way to express their knowledge in a way that complements the learning goal. Building in multiple means of expression supports learners' multiple means of action** with your content and assessments.

Further, learner expression is facilitated by gradually releasing scaffolds to support independent learning. This could mean that at the beginning of a course you may provide a lot of examples or guidance for content learning and assessment completion, but through instructor feedback and their own experience, **learners can become more independent as the course proceeds**. To complement this, structuring a course with clear learning goals and scaffolding weekly learner goals and tasks, helps learners structure their learning in a virtual learning environment with limited supervision and high independence. The various design strategies you have already explored in this course such as understanding the affordances and challenges of virtual courses

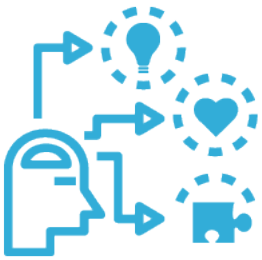
explored in Module 1, and the facilitation strategies you will explore further in Modules 3 and 4, will intrinsically assist in this area.

Multiple means of action and expression create expert learners who are **strategic and goal-oriented**.

Multiple means of engagement

Provide multiple means of engagement or offer options to stimulate interest and motivate learners. This is the 'why' of learning.

This principle focuses not so much on the modality of the content presentation, but on the forms of interaction. To recruit interest and spark excitement and curiosity for learning, you can ensure the learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content interactions have relevance, values, and authenticity. One cannot assume that all learners will find the same activities or information equally relevant or valuable to their goals but **providing options and different perspectives can enhance engagement and motivation**.



"choice" icon by Nithinan Tatah, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

When interactions and sources of information are contextualized to learners' lives and provide a diverse set of perspectives that are culturally or socially relevant and responsive, learners will be motivated and engaged. Designing activities with clear purposes, that are related to real-life or relevant problems, and allow for active participation, exploration, and experimentation, allows learners to engage with content, the instructor, and peers in meaningful ways. Deepening personal connections to courses by inviting personal responses, evaluation, and self-reflection on content and activities also strongly grounds learners in their learning process and community, increasing their motivation to be engaged. Facilitating and fostering a collaborative and engaged learning community is further explored in Modules 3 and 4.

Multiple means of engagement creates expert learners who are **purposeful and motivated**.

Key principle: UDL for equitable design

It is emphasized that UDL is designed to improve learning for everyone, however we have a particular ethical and legal responsibility to ensure learners with disabilities have equitable access to our learning spaces. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is a statute enacted in 2005 by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical and mental disabilities to all public establishments by 2025.

The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards or rules so that all Ontarians will benefit from accessible services, programs, spaces, and employment. **The standards help organizations to prevent or remove barriers that limit the things people with disabilities can do, the places they can go, and the attitudes of service providers toward them.**

(Thomson, 2018, emphasis added)

While Ontario was the first province to enact such ground-breaking legislation, interestingly while there are five standards that all organizations (including educational institutions) must follow (information and communications; employment; transportation; design of public spaces; customer service), as of mid-2021 there was no explicit education standard.

Recommended AODA education standards for digital learning and technology

The **AODA Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee** propose a number of recommendations for decreasing barriers and ensuring publicly-funded postsecondary education is more accessible to people with disabilities. Many different areas are covered, but **highlighted themes are reducing barriers to accessible online learning and addressing accommodations through a UDL approach**.

Six key AODA recommendations for virtual learning in higher education:

1. Accessible technology
2. Accessibility plan
3. Accessible procurement support
4. Accessibility training/practice
5. Accessible and inclusive pedagogy/andragogy
6. Accessible content

Going deeper

To learn more about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act or the lack of standards for educational institutions see the following pages from the AODA website:

- What is the AODA?
- AODA Requirement for Educational Institutions

You can access the full report of the AODA standards development committee recommendations at the following link; however, for the purposes of the design of a virtual course, the UDL approach provides us with a strong foundation, and we will remain focused in this area for the rest of the section.

- AODA Education Standards

Understanding the difference between accessibility and accommodation

It is likely that if we do not experience a visible or hidden disability, then we might think that the terms "accessibility" and "accommodation" are interchangeable terms, but this is incorrect.

Definitions

Accessibility "is what we **should expect to be ready for us without asking or planning ahead**. It can be provided by following an easy to implement set of standards and practices that make 'adaptation' unnecessary. We can **benefit from accessibility without announcing or explaining our disabilities**" (Pulrang, 2013, emphasis added).

Accommodation "is for **adaptations that can't be anticipated or standardized**. They are **different for each individual**. Although we should expect there to be a general willingness to accommodate us wherever we go, we can't expect actual, specific accommodations unless and until we ask for them. We do have to announce, and may have to explain our disabilities a bit in order to get accommodations" (Pulrang, 2013, emphasis added).

Accessibility is the **baseline of equal service**, and **accommodation** is the **second step** to take when accessibility alone isn't enough.

(Andrew Pulrang, 2013, emphasis added)

UDL provides a strong framework for proactively ensuring that a majority of our content and design is accessible, and the need for reactive individual accommodations is reduced.

Quick tips and tricks: Fundamentals in virtual accessible learning

If you are designing a humanized experience, you likely have already been implementing UDL principles in your content and assessment structures, however, presented are some design fundamentals to keep in mind.

- Consider **font choice for readability** (e.g., sans serif, no italics or shadowing, consider the relative font size for your medium to ensure it is readable).
- Consider the contrast of various elements (e.g., text on background, text over image, green-red colour blindness).
- **Describe nontext elements** (e.g., charts, tables, images, logos, including text on images, etc.); this is called descriptive or alt text.
- Ensure to provide **captions and a transcript** for all audio and video clips.
- Ensure as many elements in your content are **controllable by the learner** (e.g., audio can be started and stopped, an animation can be replayed, there is a way to enlarge images or text).

Going deeper

Want to ensure the materials you create are accessible to all your learners?

The **POUR principles** are a great place to start:

- Perceivable: Present information in multiple ways
- Operable: Provide options for navigation
- Understandable: Create an intuitive experience
- Robust: Ensure compatibility

The pages above from the National Centre on Accessible Educational Materials: Designing for Accessibility with POUR provides many tutorials on how to make Word, Google, and PDF documents accessible, how to write descriptive text (alt text), how to use built-in accessibility checkers, locate or create captions for videos, and more.

The POUR principles define four qualities of an accessible experience and they are at the foundation of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), an international standard for making web content accessible.

If you are looking for a nontechnical solution for accessible content creation, the University of British Columbia has created an OER Accessibility Toolkit. OERs are Open Educational Resources, and this toolkit aims to provide core resources needed to create truly accessible educational resources—ones that are accessible for all students.

Finally, the University of Toronto – Ontario Institute for Studies in Education offers an education commons page specifically on Accessibility Tools and Resources which offers a variety of accessibility checkers, checklists, and testing functionalities that allow you to gauge if your content is accessible. There are also many resources specifically dedicated to creating an accessible website.

Strategies in action: Multiple means of representation

With multiple means of representation, we aim to make the information perceptible to learners by presenting the same content, concepts, or ideas in different ways, either through different delivery modalities, different examples/metaphors (also through various modalities), or through clarifying language. We ensure that learners have the background knowledge they need to build up their skills to scaffold into higher-order learning as the course progresses. We aim to support resourceful and supported knowledgeable learners.

Example of multiple means of representation from Module 1:

- Providing assignment descriptions in text form, providing an exemplar assignment, and posting an announcement clarifying assignment expectations (either text or video), provide different means of representation for the assignment. (See 1.4. Learner–Instructor Connection: Designing Courses With Personality)
- Creating summary graphics for core concepts (e.g., images, tables, flowcharts, etc.) provides multiple means of representation of course content. (See 1.5. Learner–Content Connection: Designing Valuable Learning Experiences)

Creating multiple ways to access content

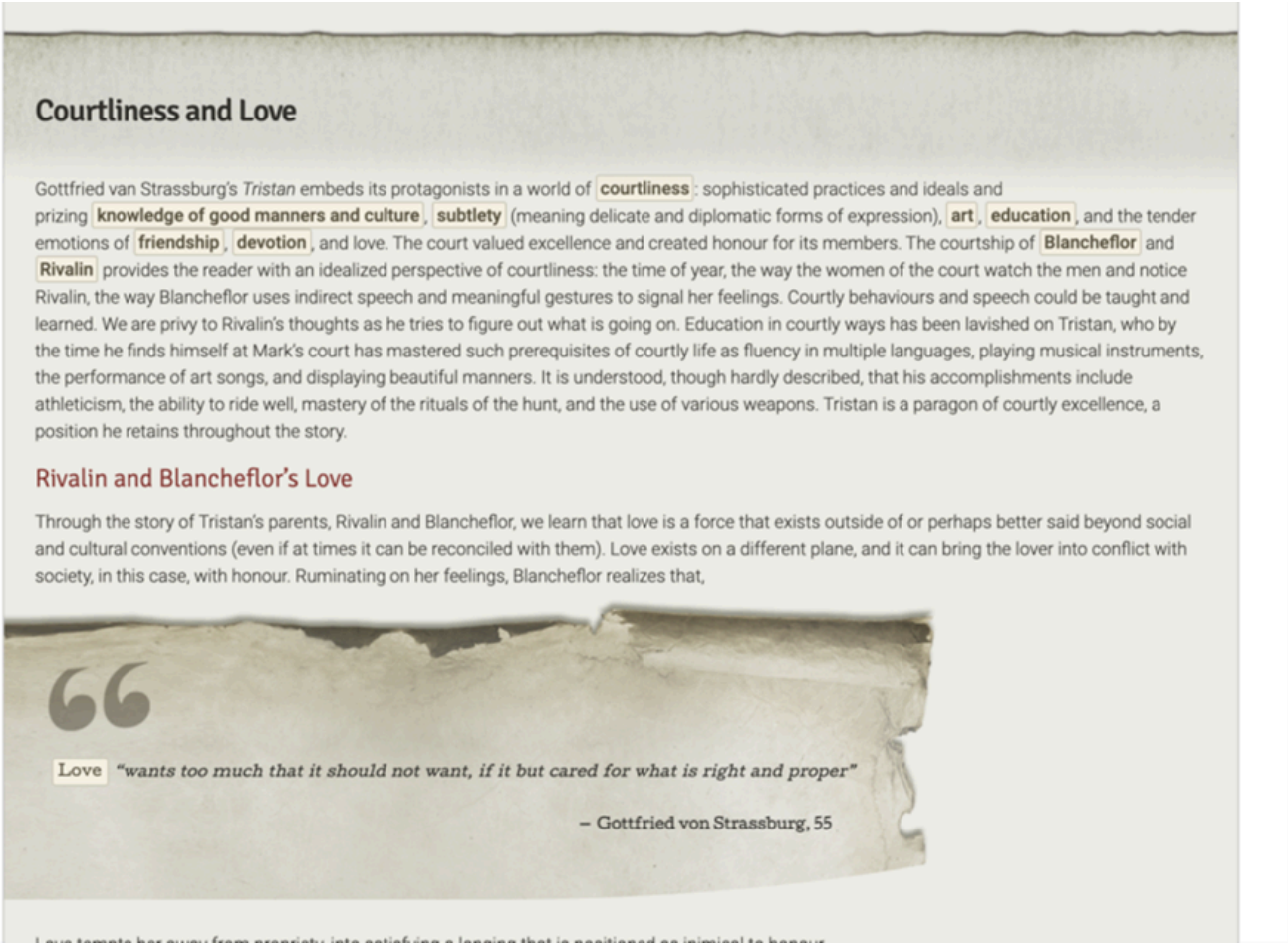
In this English course, students are provided with multiple ways in which they can engage with a text from an assigned reading. They have the option to listen to an audio of the text, they can read the text, or they can read the text while listening to the audio. The image below is a screenshot for illustrative purposes; no audio is available.

The screenshot title is Dr. Jekyll's House. There is an audio player with a 41-second clip presented. Next, a button is shown, with the words "Click here to reveal text version" on it.
Credit: Suzanne Rintoul, Interdisciplinary Studies, Conestoga College | Image description

Multiple ways to experience content

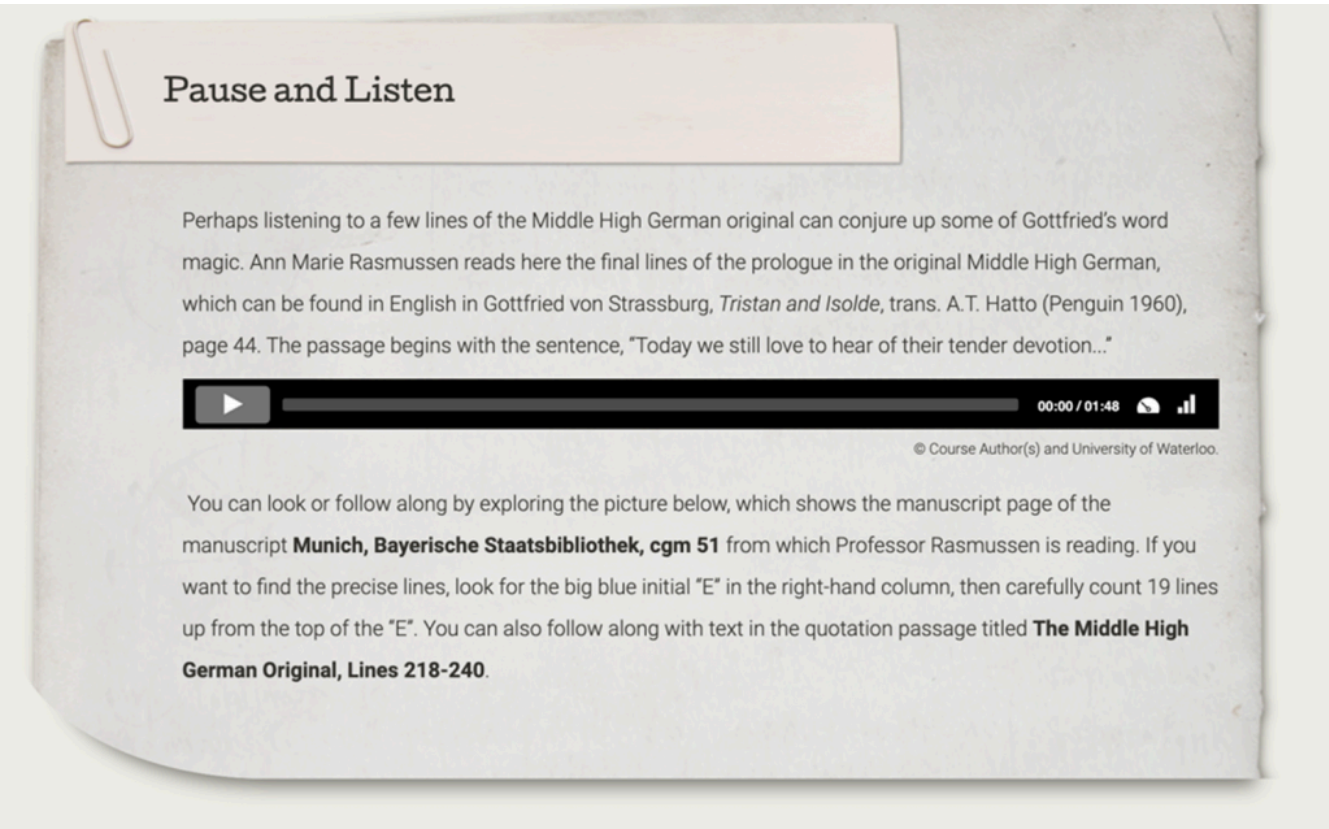
In a German literature and culture course, the course gives learners the opportunity to learn through reading, visually exploring, hearing, and watching.

Reading: the course content is presented on html pages, where the course author guides learners through the readings.



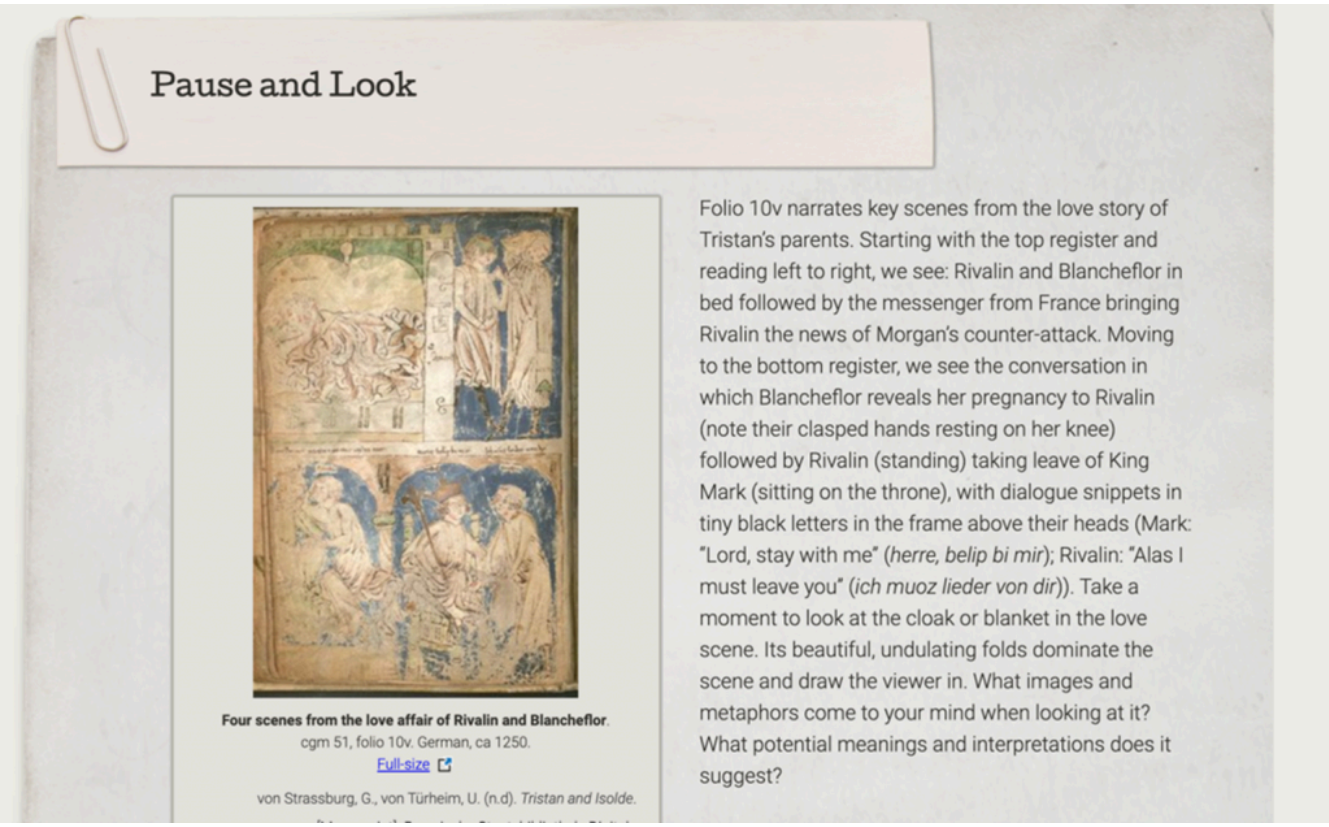
Screenshot from German course that shows text content, clearly segmented with meaningful headings, key terms highlighted, and a text quote that is in a scroll-like callout out box, making that relevant quote more prominent on the page.
Credit: Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Studies, and the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Listening: while the readings are in English with German translations, the course author reads some sections of the text in German so learners can hear the beauty of the spoken German prose. They also explore other forms of German art in the way of music and opera.



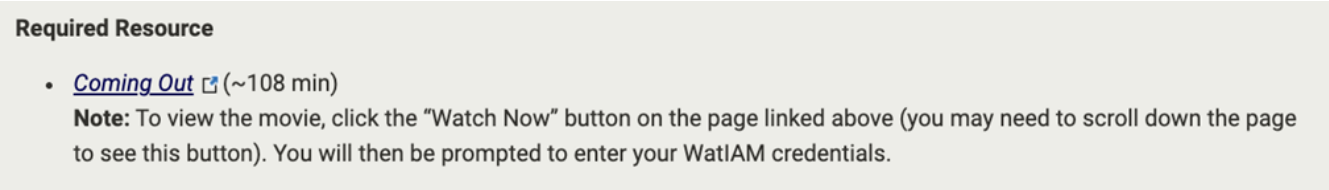
Screenshot from a German course that shows the "Pause and Listen" option where learners are provided with an audio clip of the course author reading a key segment of German reading that is being discussed in the module.
Credit: Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Studies, and the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Visually exploring: Learners are shown images and guided through a text-based visual analysis of the images. Alternative text is provided for all images in the course.



Screenshot from a German course that shows a "Pause and Look" option where learners are provided with a piece of artwork that is based on one of the readings. Learners are invited to visually explore this depiction and reflect on the metaphors in the visual, bringing new context to the reading.
Credit: Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Studies, and the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Watching: Videos and films are also part of the core content in this course. The videos also come with captions.



Screenshot from a German course that shows a link to a video resource for the course.
Credit: Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Studies, and the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Representation in a dementia course

In this open course on dementia, the approach to introducing knowledge and skills related to supporting seniors living with dementia is achieved by presenting learners with several stories of seniors living with dementia. These stories feature seniors with varied lived experiences that provide multiple different opportunities for learners to better understand the experience of seniors living with dementia and through

accessible multimedia in a personable and authentic way. This example not only highlights multiple means of representation but also multiple and authentic means of engagement.

Credit: Canadian Institute for Seniors Care, Conestoga College

Strategies in action: Multiple means of action and expression

With multiple means of action and expression we allow learners to express what they know in different ways and with increasing independence so they can learn to be strategic and goal-oriented.

Examples of multiple means of action and expression from Module 1:

- The "See one, do one, teach one" assessment strategy provides opportunities for multiple means of representation of a course concept, via **multiple means of action and expression** by the instructor and the learner(s) as well as engagement by the learner(s). (See 1.4. Learner–Instructor Connection: Designing Courses With Personality)
- Providing learners with options in how they want to approach an assignment, which allows learners

multiple means of expression.

- Individual advocacy assignment: Gives learners in a neuroscience course choice to follow a more traditional report-style format, or conduct an interview with someone. (See 1.5. Learner–Content Connection: Designing Valuable Learning Experiences)
- Group social intervention assignment: Gives learners in a psychology course the power to choose a topic that resonated with them and they go to choose the final product (intervention format) (See 1.6 Learner–Learner Connection: Designing Authentic Peer Teaching and Learning Opportunities)

Give learners choice in how they demonstrate their learning

In the same German culture course mentioned above, learners are given several different ways to demonstrate their learning, as well as some choice over how their grades will be calculated. The grade breakdown below shows the variety of different assessments and grade weighting. Notice where flexibility and options are provided to learners.

- **My Thoughts** are short writing prompts that are essentially graded as low-stakes pass/fail assessments designed to get learners writing and help them prepare for the discussions as well as the higher-stakes writing assignments. Learners can choose to skip two of these throughout the term, depending on their workload. This flexibility cuts down on learner requests for extensions and sick notes.
- **Discussion reflections** are two short discussion profiles, where learners highlight one or two discussions with their peers where they feel good about their contributions and can reflect on their interactions and discussion with their peers. This reduces some of the work of monitoring discussion for the instructor (just checking for participation/completion) and puts learners in charge of deciding which contributions they think best demonstrates their learning. The themes in the discussion are also linked to the writing assignments, so also serve to help prepare students for those higher-stakes assessments.
- **Quizzes** (three of them) are included in the course as an optional form of interaction, which test learners' knowledge of content. These also help prepare learners for each of the three writing assessments and are linked to these writing assignments in an important way, which again gives learners some more control over how their learning is assessed. Learners can choose to complete the lower-stakes quizzes, which reduces how much the paired writing assignment is worth. This gives learners who may prefer to demonstrate their learning through tests, rather than writing the option to take a content quiz and reduce the stakes of the paired writing assignment and perhaps reduce some of the stress around these assessments. For learners who are short on time or enjoy writing, they can choose to skip any quiz and take a higher weight on the paired writing assessment. They get to make this choice three times in the course, once for each quiz/writing assignment.
- **Writing assignments (three)** in this course also provide learners with options in terms of what they write on, and learners should feel prepared to write these assignments, after the scaffolded assessments that lead up to each writing assignment (My Thoughts, discussions reflection, and optional quizzes).

Grade breakdown

The following table represents the grade breakdown of this course.

Activities and assessments	Weight
Introduce yourself discussion board	Ungraded
My thoughts (submit 10 out 12)	10% (10X 1% each)
Discussion reflection(2)	18% (2 x 9% each)
Quizzes (3) (optional)	12% (3 x 4% each)*
Writing assignment 1	15% (19% if quiz 1 is not submitted)*
Writing assignment 2	20% (24% if quiz 2 is not submitted)*
Writing assignment 3	25% (29% if quiz 3 is not submitted)*

*Each quiz is paired with a writing assignment. If a quiz is not submitted, the weight of the quiz will be added to the corresponding writing assignment.

Credit: Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Studies, and the Centre for Extended Learning, University of Waterloo

Strategies in action: Multiple means of engagement

Multiple means of engagement emphasizes that learners should be stimulated and motivated through multiple means.
Information that is not attended to, that does not engage learners' cognition, is in fact inaccessible. It is inaccessible both in the moment and in the future, because relevant information goes unnoticed and unprocessed.
(CAST, 2018)

Motivating learners to **persist and stay engaged** in their learning throughout their online course is an important part of **equitable course design**.

Examples of multiple means of engagement from Module 1:

- By designing social and content-based interactions and discussions where learners can exchange ideas about core course concepts and extend them to their own lived experiences or connect them to real-world issues, learners understand the intrinsic value of what they are learning and are motivated to engage.
- Peer-to-peer teaching not only allows learners to build a stronger personal connection to the course community, a motivator in itself, but ensures that learners are motivated to understand concepts as they will have to work with/explain them to others. If at the same time we respect the natural life-cycle of learner-learner interactions (socially formative phase, socially instrumental phase, withdrawal phase), we can effectively work with typical learner behaviours to sustain persistent engagement throughout the course.

(See 1.6 Learner–Learner Connection: Designing Authentic Peer Teaching and Learning Opportunities)

Engagement with instructor, peers, and content

The German culture course example above also is an example of multiple means of engagement, as learners had the opportunity for learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content interactions.

“student” icon by The Icon Z and “instructor” icon by Ed Gray, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Instructor interactions: In this course learners have the opportunity to interact with the instructor through the feedback on their assessments throughout the course, receiving feedback on their **discussion reflections** and each of the scaffolded **writing assignments**. The instructor also posts announcements and reminders throughout the term and is available for course related-questions on the **course Q & A discussion forum** and via email for questions of a personal nature.

“student” icon by The Icon Z from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Peers interactions: learners have the opportunity to interact with and learn from each other through the course discussions.

“student” icon by The Icon Z from and “content” icon by Shakeel Ch. from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

Content interactions: learners engage with the course content which is presented on html pages as a combination of text, with images, audio recordings, videos, and ungraded concept checks (multiple-choice questions embedded on content pages).

Reflect and apply: Setting three UDL goals for your course design

Based on what you have learned in this section regarding the principles of universal design for learning (UDL), write down three goals to increase the accessibility of your course to all learners. With each goal, you will also write three tasks or brainstorm three 'next steps' to help chart a path to achieve your UDL goals.

Remember, you are not alone! The principles of UDL can be sometimes challenging to envision in terms of what it may look like in practice. Don't be afraid to discuss with your colleagues their experiences and best practices in this area or access accessibility centres or centres for teaching and learning at your institution for guidance and support.

How to complete this activity and save your work:
Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation.
2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2803#h5p-36*

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2.5 Learner mental health and wellness in virtual courses

Key principles: Unpacking mental health

In society and in PSE contexts, it is common to confuse mental health and mental illness (including mental distress, and mental disorder). That is to say, when we reference "mental health" in common speech, we are frequently referring to a problem, as opposed to a positive state of being and functioning. Contrary to the ways that mental health is commonly discussed, a truism about mental health is that everybody has it, all of the time! This is true whether at any given moment our mental health is well or unwell, stable or unstable. The World Health Organization and the Public Health Agency of Canada, respectively, offer helpful definitions of health and mental health that can help in framing and developing an inclusive concept of mental health.

Definitions

Health: "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Mental health: "the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges that we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014).

Importantly, overall health includes mental health and is not characterized by a lack of sickness, but an active state of well-being that includes mental well-being in relationship with physical and social aspects of well-being.

Here, the Public Health Agency of Canada reinforces the integral connection between mental health and overall health, and emphasizes that mental health does not exist in a vacuum, rather it is intricately connected to the broader socio-cultural landscape in which people exist.

Framing a conception of mental health that is inclusive of all people, and focused on well-being is important for many reasons, but especially for the potential that it offers in reducing the stigma associated with experiencing mental disorders or distress, which results in significant negative life outcomes for people experiencing mental disorders or mental distress.

Definitions

Mental distress: A common condition related to brain function, often caused by a problem or event, usually not severe (but can be), typically short in duration, professional intervention helpful, but not necessarily required.

Mental disorder: A less common occurrence, high severity leading to disruption of life functioning, can be unrelated to particular events or problem as an obvious antecedent, can be long-lasting and require professional resources for resolution.

Definitions derived from Canadian Mental Health Commission (2010) and Mental Health Literacy (Kutcher et al., 2017)

Regardless of whether an individual experiences mental distress or a mental disorder, their situation can be quite disorienting and cause feelings of dis-ease. No matter the severity of someone's distress or disorder, or

the presence or absence of a formal diagnosis, compassion and support are the appropriate response from PSE faculty and staff (Canadian Mental Health Commission, 2010; Kutcher et al., 2017).

In the design of humanized virtual learning environments, this kind of support usually manifests through the intentional design of instructor touchpoints that reference mental health (e.g., predesigned templates for announcements about the importance of self-care at high-intensity parts of the course or term), or strategic inclusion of links to university-based and external resources that support mental well-being (e.g., a mental health resource tab in the LMS that is linked at key places that students visit on a regular basis in each week or module).

Key principles: Destigmatizing mental illness to promote well-being

Healthy Minds Anti-Stigma (Video length ~ 1 min)

Note: Content warning – Video begins with jarring footage of a dramatized car accident where a person is struck by a vehicle and knocked unconscious.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2796#oembed-1

Transcript for Healthy Minds Anti-Stigma available on YouTube.

This video shows a person being hit by a car and then treated like someone with a mental disorder, stating, “Imagine if we treated everyone like we treat the mentally ill.” This dramatic public service announcement draws attention to the fact that mental disorders can be as, or more debilitating than physical illnesses or disabilities, and yet their impacts are often downplayed, discounted, or ignored.

To use another example, imagine that it is shared at a neighbourhood block party that the son of one of the neighbours, a university student, has been diagnosed with cancer that requires aggressive treatment. It is easy to imagine in this scenario that many neighbours would offer genuine heartfelt remarks, ask how they can help the whole family to get through, and possibly drop by with dishes of prepared food for the days or weeks following. Conversely, when it is shared that the same young male university student has been diagnosed with severe anxiety or depression, it is more difficult to predict how the neighbours might respond. Perhaps there would be expressions of remorse or concern, but the likelihood of ongoing and affirming support is more in question (Stuart, 2005).

Stigma hinders access to treatment

Stigmatization of mental illness is deep rooted and long held, and it is a significant problem because beyond the social justice aspects of respecting the dignity of all people, the experience of stigma leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and remorse for people who experience mental illness; these feelings lead to people hiding their distress or disorder, and not reaching out for support and treatment (Martin, 2010).

Key principles: Assessing and developing mental health literacy

A primary reason for the historic and ongoing stigma associated with mental illness is a lack of broad public knowledge related to mental health. Use the following diagnostic self-assessment to assess and develop knowledge related to various aspects of mental health.

Reflect and apply: Mental health literacy self-assessment

The self-assessment is an ungraded learning exercise; each question includes response feedback to help you develop your own mental health literacy. Your answers are not saved by the online quiz tool and cannot be viewed by anyone.

Activity Instructions:

Evaluate whether the following six statements are true or false, After you have selected your response, select the "**Check**" button to check your answer and reveal feedback. Navigate through the quiz questions using the back and forward arrows.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2796#h5p-34*

Credit: All quiz questions adapted from Mental Health Literacy (Kutcher et al., 2017). Response feedback was developed from Mental Health Literacy (Kutcher et al., 2017) and the Canadian Mental Health Commission (2010).

If you achieved strong results on the diagnostic self-assessment, congratulations on your mental health literacy! If not—don't stress—try to view it as an invitation. Low mental health literacy is very common, and the intention of the self-assessment is to help develop your knowledge and emphasize the importance of growing our collective mental health literacy as PSE professionals, and as human beings.

Going deeper

The Mental Health Commission of Canada hosts a training program called Mental Health First Aid which is designed to prepare community members (lay responders, non-health care professionals) to recognize and react in support to "a person developing a mental health problem, experiencing a mental health crisis, or a worsening of their mental health" (Mental Health First Aid Canada, n.d.). If you are interested in developing your knowledge and skills in mental health first aid, consider one of their virtual or face-to-face courses.

The following resource may be a helpful resource for yourself, or offer it to learners in your syllabus or LMS so they can improve their mental health literacy in a safe manner.

- Mental Health Commission of Canada Continuum Self Check

Mental health is strongly associated with food insecurity. This info sheet explores this relationship through quantitative data presentation.

- Food Insecurity and Mental Health

Strategies in action: Designing virtual learning experiences to promote well-being

Often we consider student well-being as an afterthought or secondary consideration that exists outside the central purview of our courses—something that we refer students to other services for rather than planning in a way that is integrated into our courses. Of course, referring concerns around well-being to academic support units like a healthcare or counselling centre can be entirely appropriate, and we are not suggesting that faculty need to take on a role that is best handled by professional counselling or healthcare teams. **We are suggesting that course designs that integrate checkpoints for student well-being actually help in achieving the academic outcomes that we aim for in PSE** (Keyes et al., 2012; El Ansari & Stock, 2010).

Consider the following:

Belonging and social inclusion: Students' well-being is supported when they feel connected to their instructors and peers.

Quick tips and tricks: Quick check-ins

In synchronous sessions, try to begin with a few moments of community-focused activity—a check-in on how people are feeling "outside the class" in order to set a context for what will happen "inside the class." For asynchronous designs, try to use "quick" virtual learning tools (a poll, a "tweet" length report on how people are feeling, etc.) at strategic places in a module or course unit to check in on learner well-being. This can inform decisions that you make in facilitating each part of the course.

Learning well: Learners' well-being is supported when they are motivated to learn and when they feel that they are learning effectively.

Quick tips and tricks: Positive feedback

Use natural feedback opportunities to provide motivating feedback whenever possible. This could be complimenting and extending an insightful remark a student makes in an online breakout group, or highlighting when a student demonstrates deep thinking in a discussion board post. The public nature of positive feedback has the potential to be collectively motivating for all learners—and can help the instructor be more invested.

Whole student: Well-being is supported when instructors recognize that learners have lives outside academics.

Quick tips and tricks: Engaged instructor, engaged learners!

Design with community engagement in mind! Ask students to respond to course content in ways that draw in their jobs/professional experience, families, and leisure pursuits. Reciprocate with your own personalized examples as appropriate.

Going deeper

Based on research done at UBC, the following well-being checklist interweaves many concepts discussed in this module and in this course; organized into three levels:

1. Easier to implement.
2. Requires some preparation by the instructor.
3. May require thoughtful preparation by the instructor.

Some of the examples are aimed at face-to-face instruction (learning student names, as they are not always available on screen), but others can be easily taken up in virtual contexts.

- Teaching Practices That Promote Student Well-Being (PDF)

Can you see any of these opportunities being used in your virtual learning designs?

Strategies in action: Promote course and institutional supports in your course LMS

In essence, stable well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see saw dips, along with their well-being.
(Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230)

Fortunately, most institutions have a variety of resources available to learners to access when they identify dips in their well-being. You are not responsible for always knowing how to resolve a learner's challenge(s), especially if it is outside the scope of teaching your course objectives, however, you do have a responsibility to guide learners to the right supports that may meet their needs.

Consider the resources that could be available to learners at your institution and in your course (list is not exhaustive):

- Instructor
- Teaching assistant(s)
- Peers
- Academic advisors
- Institutional IT support
- Library services
- Writing and research services
- Departmental staff (coordinators, administrators, etc.)
- Athletics and recreation
- Student unions and associated services

- Threaded video discussions
- Video or audio posts to course forums
- Synchronous video or audio discussions

- Social media
- Interactive document collaboration
- Emails, texts, and phone calls between students (typically not required but often take place informally)

Reflect and apply: Understanding institutional supports for learner well-being

Consider your learners and how familiar they might be with the resources available to them that can help them succeed in your course. Using the resource list above, respond to the questions below by indicating how you might purposefully promote appropriate resources to your learners.

How to complete this activity and save your work:
Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

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2. Hit the "**Export document**" button.
3. Hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2796#h5p-35*

Your answers to these questions might help you create a list of resources/links that you may wish to promote on a special page of your LMS. Through interactions with your learners and running your course a few times, you might find other resources that learners signal to you as being helpful.

Strategies in action: Managing student workload

Student workload is an oft-discussed construct in PSE; faculty often decry learner inability to manage demands that were considered standard at some point in the near or distant past; institutions are under pressure to design ever more time-efficient credentialing programs, and learners exist in an environment moving much faster and with more demands on time and digital distraction than ever before. Learners who experience mental distress or disorders have an additional intersection of complex experience that may make it difficult for them to meet workload expectations. Alternatively, meeting all workload expectations may come at a cost to maintaining positive mental health.

Beware virtual course scope creep

It is not uncommon for instructors to struggle a bit with **estimating what is an appropriate amount of work for a virtual** (online, remote, and blended) course. Without the constraint of dedicated and scheduled lecture time (or having online learning as an additional component/expectation in a blended course) it is **easy to include more information than would be included in an in-class version of the same course**.

The spirit of this tendency, **course scope creep**, is almost always about enhancing learning; it comes from a place of really wanting to give learners more. It can be liberating to be able to describe a process in more detail, to do a closer analysis of a concept, add more examples, assessments, and/or provide additional resources in an online component of a virtual course, which one typically can't get into in an in-person class.

"Overworked" icon by Fajar, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.

This can enhance learning for some learners; however, if this results in course scope creep (i.e., when we add without cutting elsewhere) it often means some learners simply will not have the time to engage with all the content, resources, activities and assessments for various legitimate reasons (e.g., they may simply be slow/deep processors, have other life commitments, and/or have four other heavy load courses making it impossible to do extra in your course). This means that learners will have to make **strategic decisions about what to omit from their learning**.

This can be **a source of significant stress**, and **without clear guidance from the instructor** (i.e., on what is optional/supplementary), **learners can make the wrong choices** (e.g., choosing to focus on something that they think is important, but you don't see as core and will not be assessed).

General guidance on estimating workload and avoiding course scope creep:

- Most PSE undergraduate programs suggest learners should expect to spend between **8–12 hours a week** (including activities, assessments, and working through content). For a full-time student with five courses, that is already up to almost 60 hours a week of pretty intense cognitively demanding work (learning is hard work). That's a lot!
- Use a **workload calculator** (see the "Going Deeper" resources below) to help you estimate how much you are asking of your learners. It can be helpful to do this for virtual courses as well as typical in-class courses.
- If you already have your course ready to go and don't have time to make changes to content and assessments this time around, **ask your learners** in this next offer (using an anonymous survey) how much time they spent on each of the activities, assignments, and modules/weeks of content. This will at least give you an idea of where learners are spending their energy and you can then make tweaks to reduce the load, and or messaging to help them focus on what is critical.
- When calculating **workload/time for blended courses**, don't forget to include the duration of time for in-class activities and the time learners may need to prep for activities and assessments before and after the in-class sections. Some instructors choose to shorten in-class sections (shorter than typical lectures) to give learners some time back.
- **If you are adding, think about what you can take away** or make optional. Ensure you are signaling clearly and consistently to learners **what is core, critical, and will be assessed** from what is additional and supplementary and won't be directly assessed.
- **If in doubt, go with less rather than more**. Don't be afraid of giving learners some space to process or let them know that you are intentionally giving them extra time to work on activities and assessments, by reducing the load elsewhere. This can send a strong signal when you want them to prioritize an activity or assessment. Significant learning takes time.

Rethinking the value of rigour in PSE

Underlying the debate for more or less workload in PSE is a historical adherence to **rigour** as a measure of academic quality. Consider, though, that the definition of rigour denotes terms like **rigidity**, **harshness**, **inflexibility**, and **severity** much more than it does quality of learning (Oxford University Press, 2021). Are these conceptions representative of what a designer would want for the virtual learning experiences that they develop?

Most faculty are hesitant to adjust coursework expectations in ways that promote students spending less time on their course; however, there is a reality that the contemporary PSE learner experience is not what it was even a decade ago (in part because many PSE institutions are now more inclusive than they have been in the past). Many learners have legitimate demands on their time that are external to their life as a PSE learner (e.g., jobs, family caregiving, mental health self-care, etc.). In thinking about management of student workload, we suggest **putting aside the legacy of rigour**, and **focusing on quality delivery of the learning outcomes** identified for a particular course or learning experience.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the learning outcomes intended for this unit of learning? What is the **core content** and required for the delivery of those outcomes? What **additional/extension content** can be provided to extend or deepen the impact of the identified learning outcomes?
- **How exactly are the learning outcomes connected to course content**, in particular: session/module content, and course assessments?
- **How much time do you estimate that learners will need to spend** over a given week/portion of coursework to complete the session content and course assignments for that portion of the course? (See the "Going deeper" resources immediately below for information on student effort and workload expectations in the PSE sector).
- **What interactions are the minimum required** (learner-instructor, learner-content, learner-learner) interactions with the course that are needed to ensure that the learning outcomes can be achieved with a view to a transformative learning experience (as opposed to mere coverage)?
- **What accommodations could you provide** that might allow some or all students to spend less time on course elements and still achieve the learning outcomes identified in the course syllabus in a way that is meaningful and has the potential to be transformative?

These last two questions are of the utmost importance. Linking back to section 2.4. Universal Design for Learning and Equitable Access to Content, the ideal course design is one that allows all learners to achieve learning outcomes in a meaningful way, with the potential of experiencing transformative learning. Some learners may be in a position to exceed learning expectations through engagement with additional/extension content, or deeper engagement in core content than is strictly required for achieving the learning outcomes. For students experiencing mental distress or disorder, **the opportunity to engage with the "minimum" expectation that has meaningful learning may mean the difference between a humanizing learning experience and an exclusionary push out of PSE**.

Going deeper

How much time do your students spend on your course each week? Likely less than you might think. Is it a student's responsibility to meet our expectations for time on course material? Or do faculty/course designers need to rethink our expectations? In this think piece, Gavan Watson argues the latter.

- We Have an Obligation to Design Courses for the Time Students Have

The following course workload calculator uses research on student work and reading speeds to help instructors estimate how much work they are asking learners to complete:

- Rice University, Center for Teaching Excellence: Course Workload Estimator

Strategies in action: Addressing sensitive topics

When it comes to teaching sensitive topics, we know that just about every topic is sensitive to someone. A content warning might help some, but it might trigger others (or make them think they should be triggered), and there are lots of times when a seemingly straightforward topic can bring up unanticipated yet painful associations for someone. Do not shy away from difficult content when curating material for your course, just prepare learners for it in advance (e.g., within the syllabus, at the beginning of a module, or scaffolding from less sensitive material) and provide information for accessing appropriate institutional resources as applicable. More information about preparing appropriate content warnings and facilitating difficult conversations will be further discussed in Module 4.

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2.6 The road to decolonizing and Indigenizing a virtual course

Key principles: Looking within to take responsibility, looking forward to take action

Note

© Jenny Stodola (2022). Winter sunrise in lake Ontario.

Readers should note that this section of this module was authored by a second-generation, female, able-bodied settler Canadian of central European descent and of middle-class upbringing, Jenny Stodola. I (Jenny) have summarized the discourse, principles, and strategies here as a snapshot representing my own journey towards decolonization and reconciliation undertaken as an intentional professional and personal development effort over the last three years. This work comes from my perspective as a white Settler instructional designer working in the post-secondary education (PSE) context and as a human being growing up, living, and working on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee (Kingston and Napanee area) and unceded territories of the Algonquin (Ottawa area). I hope the lens I bring to the table can help others begin or continue their own reconciliation work. This does not represent a static piece of material, but as a springboard to further learning and understanding. It also attempts to privilege Indigenous perspectives, but I must disclose that in the process of writing this, I already am well aware that some important work by Indigenous scholars in the land we call Canada have not been included due to space and cognitive limitations. If this work speaks to you, consider searching for resources and scholars that tackle Indigenizing the academia, particularly in the Canadian context.

I am grateful for the opportunity to listen to and learn from Indigenous colleagues and Elders, learn from settler allies, and pass my growing and evolving understandings to those I collaborate with. I am grateful for the contributions of PSE colleagues to this work, but in particular for the guidance and support of Mitchell Huguenin and Blair Niblett for guiding the writing of this section.

It is well-recognized that colonization has had far-reaching effects on **Indigenous Peoples in Canada, First Nations, Inuit**, and **Métis**, from destruction of entire Peoples, removal and displacement from traditional lands and legislation to resolve the "Indian Problem"' (principally through the Indian Act, which further restricted freedoms of movement and removal of self-sufficiency). These colonizing acts have led to well-documented gaps in Indigenous health and wellness, related to the disconnection between Indigenous Peoples and their lands, governance, languages, and cultures, which includes their ways of knowing, teaching, learning, and being.

In the following video, Indigenous speaker and educator Eddy Robinson shares his story and explains why it is

important that non-indigenous people of Canada listen to these stories and histories and not jump to solutions or try to help without understanding what has happened or without listening.

What non-indigenous Canadians need to know (Video length ~5 min)

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#oembed-1*

Transcript for What non-indigenous Canadians need to know is available on YouTube.

As educators, we have a responsibility to walk a path of reconciliation and take action to do work to unravel detrimental and harmful colonial practices that have historically impacted the health, wellness, and vitality of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and continue to this day. This work is not just comprised of grand gestures, but much of the important work that needs to be done is through smaller and continuous acts of reconciliation. The 'education' of Indigenous children through Residential Schools and Indian Day Schools from the 1880s to 1996, through which "cultural genocide" (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 1) was enacted, is of particular importance for the PSE sector in Canada to recognize, no matter the discipline.

. . . Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

(The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 6.)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2019)

For those of us who are **settler Canadians**, whether our ancestors arrived in Canada generations ago or are newcomers to Canada, we have the responsibility to ensure that we take steps to educate the next generation about our shared history and recognize the vibrancy and contributions of its original Peoples.

A quick word on the meaning of the term "settler"

As discussed in Beyond the Lecture: Innovations in Teaching Canadian History, a lot of people in Canada take offence to being called "settlers" even though the term is not derogatory.

Consider this excerpt from *Beyond the Lecture*:

Being a settler means that you are non-Indigenous and that you or your ancestors came and settled in a land that had been inhabited by Indigenous people (think: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc.). However, it is important to recognize that while the term is not derogatory, it can often be very difficult to hear. Many people,

particularly when first learning about the subject of settler colonialism, have strong and negative reactions to it. Most of us like to think that we are good people, and being told that we're complicit in a colonial project can be emotionally wrenching. So we would like to encourage those who are interested in learning about this subject to make space for their feelings, recognizing them without judgement, and, whenever possible, to extend the same consideration to others. This is not to suggest that racist behaviour is acceptable under any circumstances, but, rather, that each person is on their own journey.

(Chapter 21)

Going deeper

To learn more about the term "settler colonialism" and guidelines related to learning and teaching about this topic, we recommend the following chapter from the *Beyond the Lecture* ebook, Imagining a Better Future: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning About Settler Colonialism in Canada.

Reconciliation as a settler responsibility

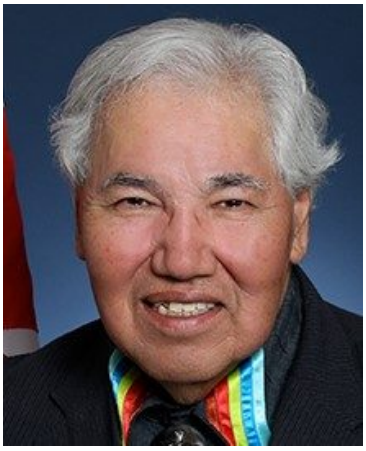
Educators have been implored to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): Calls to Action, particularly the call to **"integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms"** (Call to Action #62).

The TRC Calls to Action #62-65 are specifically directed towards the education sector, but it is very important to note that the remainder of the 94 Calls to Action fall under all areas of life, including: child welfare, health, language and culture, justice, museum and archives, professional development, media and journalism, sports, and business/corporate, among others. **Often these Calls to Actions are framed towards governments; however we can easily translate them to the PSE context** given the often-publicly-funded aspect of the PSE sector as well as the fact that our graduates may work for governments or directly in these sectors in the future. The reality is that these Calls to Action touch all of Canadian society. No matter the discipline, there is real work to be done to reorient our perspectives of the country we call Canada and its history and contemporary reality, and to work for equity and justice in our disciplinary spheres.

Reconciliation is primarily a "settler responsibility," though it benefits everyone. Indigenization and decolonization, which will be explored later in this section, is a shared responsibility among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

Education got us into this mess and education will get us out.

(Justice Murray Sinclair, Head of Truth and Reconciliation Commission)



Sinclair (2016)

Reflect and apply: Stop and reflect on the TRC Calls to Action

Take a few minutes to read the **Education for reconciliation sections in the** TRC Calls to Action [PDF](**62-65**). If you have time, we strongly encourage you to also read or scan the **94 Calls to Action from the TRC**, as you may find many of these overlap with your own work in PSE and with the learners you are teaching.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Consider the questions and write out your initial ideas in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
2. then hit the "**Export document**" button, and
3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#h5p-41

Going deeper

Indigenous history on Turtle Island

If you are unfamiliar with the colonial history of Canada, the first step is to do the emotional labour and take the time to do the research to educate yourself on these topics. There are a plethora of resources available out there, and many can be found online or at your local or institutional library.

The following keywords and links related to the history (particularly the post-contact history) of Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island (the place we now call Canada) can help you in your research:

- First Nations / Inuit / Métis – Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada
- Treaties / Métis Scrip system
- Indian Act
- Residential schools / Indian day schools + intergenerational trauma
- Indian hospitals
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation – About NCTR
- Qikiqtani Truth Commission – Key Findings
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)
- Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (UNDRIP)

A short, readable article explaining the term 'reconciliation' in the Canadian context:

- What reconciliation is and what it is not

Five national Indigenous leadership groups in Canada (not inclusively representing all Indigenous Peoples in Canada):

- Assembly of First Nations (AFN)
- Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP)
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)
- Métis National Council (MNC)
- Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

Note: If searching through video sites such as YouTube, we suggest that you privilege watching videos produced by Indigenous filmmakers, producers, or organizations, or first-person accounts/interviews so you can ensure to hear from Indigenous Peoples themselves rather than the standard Euro-Canadian-centric perspective. Finding such authors for content on websites/in scholarly articles may not be as easily discerned, so we recommend that unless seeking very specific governmental information, be sure to broaden your review beyond strictly government sources.

Some recommended multimedia resources include:

- Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
- Eagle Feather News
- CBC Indigenous (Indigenous reporters/producers such as Connie Walker, Duncan McCue, Ka'nhehsí:io Deer, etc.)
- Indigenous Cinema National Film Board
- imagineNative
- Many educational institutions now have an Indigenous resources or research guide offered through the central library which can act as a helpful launch point.

Key principles: Terminology

The term **"Indigenous"** is the most widely used, internationally-accepted, all-encompassing word used to refer

to Indigenous peoples all over the world, and is the term used by the United Nations. Those living in Canada are legally referred to as "Aboriginal" in the Canadian Constitution, and these Peoples are represented by three distinct groups. These include the **First Nations**, **Métis**, and **Inuit**. However, prior to European contact, Indigenous Peoples in Canada were only comprised of First Nations and Inuit.

The terms "Indian" and "Aboriginal" still persist in our vocabulary due to the ongoing existence of government legislation such as the Indian Act, and, as mentioned, the inclusion of "Aboriginal" in the Canadian Constitution. However, **"Indigenous" is the more widely used term in Canada today due to the colonial vestiges of the former terms**. If one is referring to a broad range of groups, then **"Indigenous Peoples"** with a capital 'I' and 'P' and pluralized is often preferred as it acknowledges the diversity of Indigenous groups, and prevents 'pan-Indigenous' thinking (i.e., the idea that all Indigenous Peoples are the same, where in reality, each group has a distinct culture and way of interacting with the world around them).

- Avoid "possessive" language such as "Indigenous Peoples **of** Canada" or "**Canada's** Indigenous Peoples," instead, use terminology such as "**Indigenous Peoples in Canada**."

This terminology may seem confusing and overwhelming, but when in doubt, Indigenous Peoples generally prefer the most specific term available. This may be their Nation, their clan, or their community, among others. If in doubt, it is reasonable to ask for someone's preference.

Going deeper

We can suggest a few resources for a deeper understanding of preferred terminology:

- Communicating Positively: A Guide on Terminology (Trent University)
- Indigenous Peoples terminology guidelines for usage (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.)
- Briefing Note on Terminology (University of Manitoba)
- Terminology Guide (Queen's University)
- Indigenous Terminology Guide (PDF, University of Waterloo)
- Use these culturally offensive phrases, questions at your own risk (Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc.)

Key principle: Acknowledging our starting point

Generally speaking, **decolonizing** work in the Canadian academy is actually a misnomer and has been argued to actually represent a spectrum of three different uses for the term **indigenization** whose "meanings are not always compatible with one another, even if this incompatibility is obscured by an overlapping usage of the same terminology" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

University of Waterloo

Consider these important distinctions on the Indigenization spectrum

Indigenous inclusion: "[A] policy that aims to increase the number of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the Canadian academy. Consequently, it does so largely by supporting the adaption of Indigenous people to the current (often alienating) culture of the Canadian academy."

Reconciliation indigenization: "[A] vision that locates indigenization on common ground between Indigenous and Canadian ideals, creating a new, broader consensus on debates such as what counts as knowledge, how should Indigenous knowledges and European-derived knowledges be reconciled, and what types of relationships academic institutions should have with Indigenous communities."

Decolonial indigenization: "[E]nvisions the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balancing power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new."

Source: Gaudry & Lorenz (2018)

There are tensions in the work of Indigenization and decolonization as PSE struggles with **how to ethically engage Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge systems**. Although there have been Indigenous and settler scholars and educational support professionals trailblazing in these areas for many decades, we are still in the infancy of this work and often well-meaning policies are produced in a vacuum which can result in **tokenism** or in ultimately unsupportive situations. However, since the TRC Final Report release in 2015, momentum in PSE is growing and the beginnings of successful models are emerging. It is important that non-indigenous people take thoughtful steps towards Indigenous truth, inclusion, and reconciliation, as this is vital to Indigenization and lays the foundation for the development of robust systems, structures, and education spaces that can transform our education systems into something meaningful, vibrant, and new.

The following video highlights some Indigenous educators' explanations of what they see as true reconciliation.

What is reconciliation? Indigenous educators have their say (Video length ~4 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#oembed-2

Transcript for What is reconciliation? Indigenous educators have their say is available on YouTube.

We recognize it can feel incredibly intimidating and challenging to know **where** to start with this work, and to know **how** to actually start. The remainder of this section will explore some **starting strategies** to begin to incorporate reconciliation Indigenization principles into your work, not only to ensure any Indigenous learners in your courses feel seen and heard in your classes, but also so that we can 'walk the walk and talk the talk' of our responsibilities to reconciliation.

Quick tips and tricks: Understanding your motivations and the process

The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queen's University rightly points out that people often disagree about what the end goal of decolonization and Indigenization is or should be. Their suggestion to instructors is that rather than focusing on the end goal, you consider two elements:

1. **It's important to think about the reasons you're decolonizing**: who are you doing it for and why are you doing it? This helps avoid issues of tokenism and recolonization.

2. **Remember that decolonization is a process, not a product**. Instead of wondering where the finish line is, take a step along the journey and see where it leads you.

Credit: What is Decolonization? What is Indigenization? Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University,

Going deeper

Gaudry and Lorenz's 2018 article provides for more in-depth explorations of Indigenization in the Academy. They also offer some additional readings for your further learning.

- Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy

Tuck (2012) is a commonly referenced article that helps us understand that decolonization goes beyond thinking differently and that meaningful actions are required.

- Decolonization is not a metaphor

Strategies in action: Acknowledging our positionality and the approach to this work

In sections 2.2 Equity and inclusivity in virtual learning and 2.3 Social justice in virtual learning contexts of this module you took some time to review your positionality and factors that influence your privilege and oppression through personal reflection and the power flower. Depending on how you responded to these activities, you may have some level of comfort in tackling the work of Indigenization; though you may also have some fears and concerns. The authors of Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors suggest a series of levels that can help articulate these fears or concerns; they are not progressive levels, but they show that there are various levels of resistance and barriers to Indigenizing practice, fields of study, and institutions.

Reflect and apply: Inspect the Indigenization levels

When doing decolonizing and Indigenizing work, it is important to continually reflect and situate yourself in your particular context. "We are all treaty people" is intended to emphasize that all people living in Canada have treaty rights and responsibilities. As educators our responsibilities include undertaking the work of Indigenization bravely, despite personal fears of concerns.

Using the levels of Indigenization offered by the authors of Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors, reflect on the questions posed and respond, either from your own perspective and how you feel yourself, or, from the perspective of how others are reacting to your work. Take a moment to sit with each set of questions but respond only to questions that resonate with you.

Credit: Adapted from Levels of resistance to Indigenization created by Indigenization Project Steering Committee for Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors | Image Description

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the question in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

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To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#h5p-45

Wise practices in Indigenization

It is important to be honest on where you are along the reconciliation and Indigenizing journey.

How did you position yourself in the Indigenization levels above?

It is ok to have concerns and fears, even intense ones, but they must be confronted in order to move forward, for yourself and your learners. This leads us to three wise practices: **knowing yourself, collaboration**, and **learning from mistakes**.

In the following video, Ryerson professor Pamela Palmater shares her experience and approach to having honest, difficult, and often emotional conversations about reconciliation and Canada's history with learners.

Why do Indigenous topics cause such emotional discomfort? (Video length ~4 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#oembed-3

Transcript for Why do indigenous topics cause such emotional discomfort? is available on YouTube.

Knowing yourself

Colonial systems persist in modern-day society, harming, ignoring, or disadvantaging Indigenous Peoples, often to the benefit (privilege) of non-Indigenous groups. Therefore, before the Indigenization process can begin, it is essential that instructors reflect critically on their own positionality. Unawareness of personal privileges and/or biases can hinder the ways in which they understand Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning – this is thus a critical first step (Huguenin, n.d.).

- **Working through unlearning and relearning** the collective histories of Canada is an emotional journey.
- **Non-Indigenous instructors often feel anger, guilt, and shame** for not having known about the atrocities levelled against a population in this country; confront these emotions and work through them.
- Instructors exploring ways to include Indigenous content have to **reflect on and identify their own perceptions of Indigenous identity**, along with their **personal biases.**
- Ask yourself:

    - **Whose truths are valued and represented in your course(s), discipline, institution?**
    - **What counts as knowledge, and why is this?**
- **Jane Lew suggests to "[m]ake space, take space"** (personal communication, 2017 in Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors) – give yourself time to explore and appreciate Indigenous worldviews and take the time to understand and disrupt beliefs and misconceptions.

Collaboration

Nothing about us, without us.
(Herbert, 2017)

This, or similar phraseology, has been used by many marginalized/oppressed peoples, especially in the disability activism community, but has most recently been used by a number of Indigenous, People of Colour, and Black folks (Herbert, 2017).

It's about building relationships

It is essential that the work of Indigenizing and decolonizing virtual education be done in partnership with Indigenous Peoples. **Establishing relationships** however, takes considerable time and effort, as many Indigenous People have experienced negative interactions with non-Indigenous institutions (e.g., the government, the education system, the healthcare system) in the past. Instructors will need to work hard to build relationships of trust that overcome the damage caused by colonization (Huguenin, n.d.).

Seek guidance and resources offered by your institutions

Most institutions have staff that can support this process – for example, Indigenous support services staff, or a colleague who has established strong, positive relationships with Indigenous partners. Also seek allies, persons such as yourself, who are on the reconciliation journey so you can learn from each other and build stronger support systems for Indigenization at your institution.

During an initial meeting, be it with an Indigenous staff member, Indigenous support services unit, Elder, Indigenous academic or community member, you should be clear about your goals, ask questions, be prepared to make mistakes and, as necessary, apologize for those mistakes. This is a lifelong process that can be challenging, but through patience and practice, relationships will grow.

- **Professional humility** is being aware that we cannot know everything.
- Indigenous knowledge is **highly contextual and strongly grounded to the land**; local knowledge is all around us – explore institutional and relational supports (e.g., communities themselves or community centres or organizations).
- Ask your questions with a **kind heart and an open mind**.
- Ask your questions with the understanding that **some of the work required to answer them is yours**.

Your (un)learning is your responsibility

It is important that we each take responsibility for our own (un)learning. When seeking guidance from Indigenous colleagues, staff, or community members, **it is important that we not shift that burden onto those individuals**. Understand that quite practically speaking there are fewer Indigenous than non-Indigenous persons in the post-secondary sector to begin with because of long-standing colonization policies and practices which creates a system that is difficult for Indigenous Peoples to enter. These persons who are in PSE are often overworked at their institutions, and while often willing and wanting to help, you need to be careful of how much you ask for, not only in workload but in terms of emotional labour. This is why **your own learning journey is extremely important**.

Going deeper

The following article provides a commentary on taking responsibility for our own (un)learning from Mel Lefebvre, a Red River Métis/Irish writer and visual artist living on Kanien'kehá:ka Territory: It's not my job to teach you about Indigenous People

Before reaching out to Indigenous scholars, community members, or Elders, consider the ideas of **relationality**, **reciprocity**, and **potential protocols that need to be attended to** before you take the first step. Jesse Popp, an Indigenous scholar, offers 10 considerations to help those intending to reach out for information or collaboration.

- Want to reach out to an Indigenous scholar? Awesome! But first, here are 10 things to consider

Learning from mistakes

As alluded to previously, the fear of making a mistake inhibits necessary work. Learning from mistakes is a common aspect of Indigenous pedagogy; it involves experiential learning and self-development.

After the process of acknowledging and fixing a mistake, it's then time to let go, move forward, and continue to work together.

You may feel uncomfortable when you make mistakes but try to also be grateful for the opportunity to learn and ask questions.

Going deeper

In building your Indigenized practice, the authors of Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers provide additional insights from Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and their experiences with mistakes. The following link will take you to this section of the book:

- Learning from mistakes

Key principle: Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies

Indigenous epistemologies (how knowledge can be known) and pedagogies (how knowledge can be taught) have quite a different starting point from common Western approaches to knowing and teaching. However, if we gain an understanding of Indigenous approaches, we can thoughtfully interweave them into our curricula. While there is much diversity among Indigenous Peoples, and therefore among Indigenous way of knowing, teaching, or learning, many Indigenous education scholars have argued there are also some notable commonalities among Indigenous societies worldwide.

The following content has been adapted from the open educational resource, Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers, Section 2: Meaningful Integration of Indigenous Epistemologies and Pedagogies to give you a brief overview of Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies.

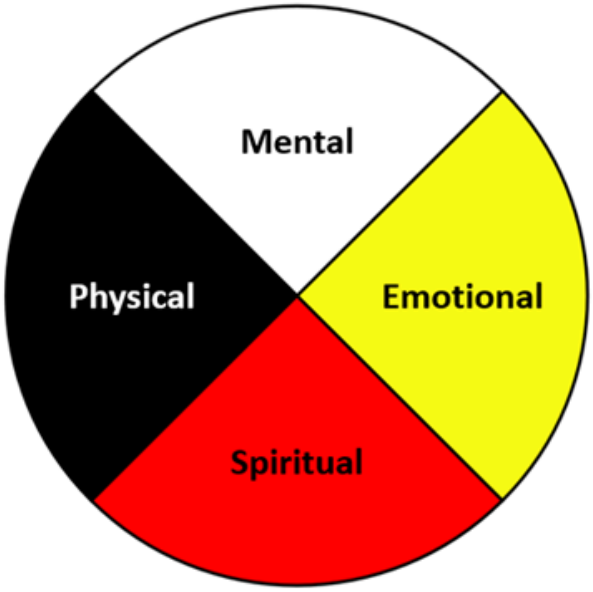
Indigenous epistemologies

Consider these Indigenous epistemologies

Relationality: Relationality is the concept that we are all related to each other, to the natural environment, and to the spiritual world, and these relationships bring about interdependencies. Instructors and course designers can apply the concept of relationality by creating learning opportunities that emphasize learning in relationships with fellow students, teachers, families, members of the community, and the local lands.

Sacred and Secular: According to Hoffman (2013), "Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies are rooted in worldviews that are inclusive of both the sacred and the secular. [In Indigenous ontologies] the world exists in one reality composed of an inseparable weave of secular and sacred dimensions" (p. 190). In Western educational approaches, spirituality is often seen as taboo in the classroom. In an Indigenous approach, spiritual dimensions cannot be separated from secular dimensions, and spirituality is a necessary component of learning. This does not mean that students need to embrace a specific "religious" approach or practice, but rather, educators interested in incorporating Indigenous epistemologies into their course should consider spiritual development as a component of learning.

[W]holism: The principle of holism/wholism is linked to that of relationality, as Indigenous thought focuses on the whole picture because everything within the picture is related and cannot be separated. Cindy Blackstock (2007), the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, identifies four interconnected dimensions of knowledge that are common in Indigenous epistemologies: "emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and physical," which are "informed by ancestral knowledge which is to be passed to future generations" (p. 4). In Indigenous epistemologies, these four elements are inseparable, and human development and well-being involves attending to and valuing all of these realms. Oftentimes, you may see this represented by the image of the medicine wheel/sacred hoop.



Caption: Medicine Wheel originated from Anishinaabe tradition representing the four aspects of being.
Credit: Yunyi Chen, Centre for Teaching & Learning, Queen's University | Holistic Framework

Indigenous philosophies are underlain by a worldview of interrelationships among the spiritual, the natural and the self, forming the foundation or beginnings of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

(Willie Ermine, 1995)

Indigenous pedagogies

A basic assumption of Indigenous education scholars is that there are modes of Indigenous pedagogy that stem from pre-contact Indigenous educational approaches and are still ingrained in Indigenous contemporary culture. The exclusion or devaluation of Indigenous pedagogies can create a barrier to academic success for Indigenous students, limit a genuine understanding of Indigenous culture and history for all students, and prevent people from learning how to exercise highly valuable and useful modes of thought which could potentially address many problems in the modern world. Some key commonalities among Indigenous pedagogical approaches are outlined below.

Consider these Indigenous Pedagogies

Personal and holistic: As a result of the epistemological principle of (w)holism, Indigenous pedagogies focus on the development of a human being as a whole person. Academic or cognitive knowledge is valued, but self-awareness, emotional growth, social growth, and spiritual development are also valued. It is useful for instructors and course designers to keep this in mind when creating learning experiences that interweave both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing.

For example, Indigenous approaches can be brought to life by providing opportunities for students to reflect on the **four dimensions of knowledge** (emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and physical) when they engage in learning activities. This may also include allowing students opportunities to challenge dominant ideologies that neglect emotional and spiritual knowledge domains.

Experiential: Indigenous pedagogies are experiential because they emphasize learning by doing. In traditional pre-contact societies, young people learned how to participate as adult members of their community by practicing the tasks and skills they would need to perform as adults. In a contemporary setting, an emphasis on experiential learning means a preference for learning through observation, action, reflection, and further action. For instructors and course designers, this also means acknowledging that personal experience is a highly valuable type of knowledge and method of learning, and creating opportunities within courses for students to share and learn from direct experience.

Place-based learning: Indigenous pedagogies connect learning to a specific place, and thus knowledge is situated in relationship to a location, experience, and group of people. For curriculum developers, this means creating opportunities to learn about the local place and to learn in connection to the local place.

Intergenerational: In Indigenous communities, the most respected educators have always been **Elders**. In pre-contact societies, Elders had clear roles to play in passing on wisdom and knowledge to youth, and that relationship is still honoured and practiced today. Some Elders are the knowledge holders of 60 different Indigenous languages in Canada, and language is a key component of Indigenous culture that should be integrated in teaching practices if we are to move toward Indigenization of curriculum. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can learn a lot from Elders, and instructors and course designers can seek opportunities to engage with Elders as experts in Indigenous pedagogies.

Note

The appropriate use of Indigenous pedagogies

Misappropriation (using the intellectual property, traditional knowledge, or cultural expressions, from a culture that is not one's own without permission) challenges Indigenous Peoples' rights of expression, protection and transmission of cultural knowledge. As such, there are important protocols that instructors must follow to ensure the appropriate and respectful use of Indigenous pedagogies and resources:

In the mainstream academic system, copyright is used to ensure permission for written resources. In Indigenous cultures, oral permission is required to use cultural materials or practices such as legends, stories, songs, designs, crests, photographs, audiovisual materials, and dances.

(Antoine et al., 2020)

Permission to use such materials or practices may be considered in the context of one's intent and relationship with the owners.

Instructors must therefore build connections with Indigenous communities so that they can incorporate Indigenous culture in ways that are not harmful or exploitative.

This may be harder work than simply adding an Indigenous text, speaker, or activity into a course, but it is the responsibility of all educators to engage in this work.

(Antoine et al., 2020)

Credit: Mitchell Huegenin, Trent University (Integrating Indigenous Pedagogy in Remote Courses)

Key principle: Connecting Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning to humanized learning

If you have worked through **Module 1** you may have already started to make the connection between Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning with key principles of humanized learning, including **Fink's**

Taxonomy of the six dimensions of significant learning and the **three types of connection** for significant learning (learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content).

When we thoughtfully and appropriately integrate Indigenous worldviews into our courses, we can create a more rich, deep, and inclusive learning experience for all students. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to pause, take a step back, and critically evaluate learning outcomes, content, and assessment design from a completely different perspective. This type of critical evaluation is by no means easy and takes a lot of personal development, learning, and support to achieve, however when framed in the context of humanizing the course experience, this can seem less daunting. Several approaches to this type of work are offered for your consideration the rest of this section, holistic frameworks for learning, assessments that align with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, and connecting to the land in virtual spaces.

Strategies in action: Using holistic frameworks for learning

While this course has sought to humanize the online learning experience, sometimes our Western-based approaches continue to privilege content knowledge as the 'goal' of the educational experience and it is only in considering different ways of knowing and learning that we can consider that alternate forms of knowledge and how they can be demonstrated are possible. Two examples of holistic approaches to learning outcomes and rubrics are presented in this section.

Creating holistic learning outcomes based on Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning

Recall that in Module 1.3 – Setting the Stage for Significant and Courageous Learning, you were introduced to Fink's taxonomy of significant learning which included six dimensions that focus on a change or transformation in the learner. The six dimensions include:

- foundational knowledge,
- application,
- integration,
- human dimension,
- caring, and
- learning to learn.

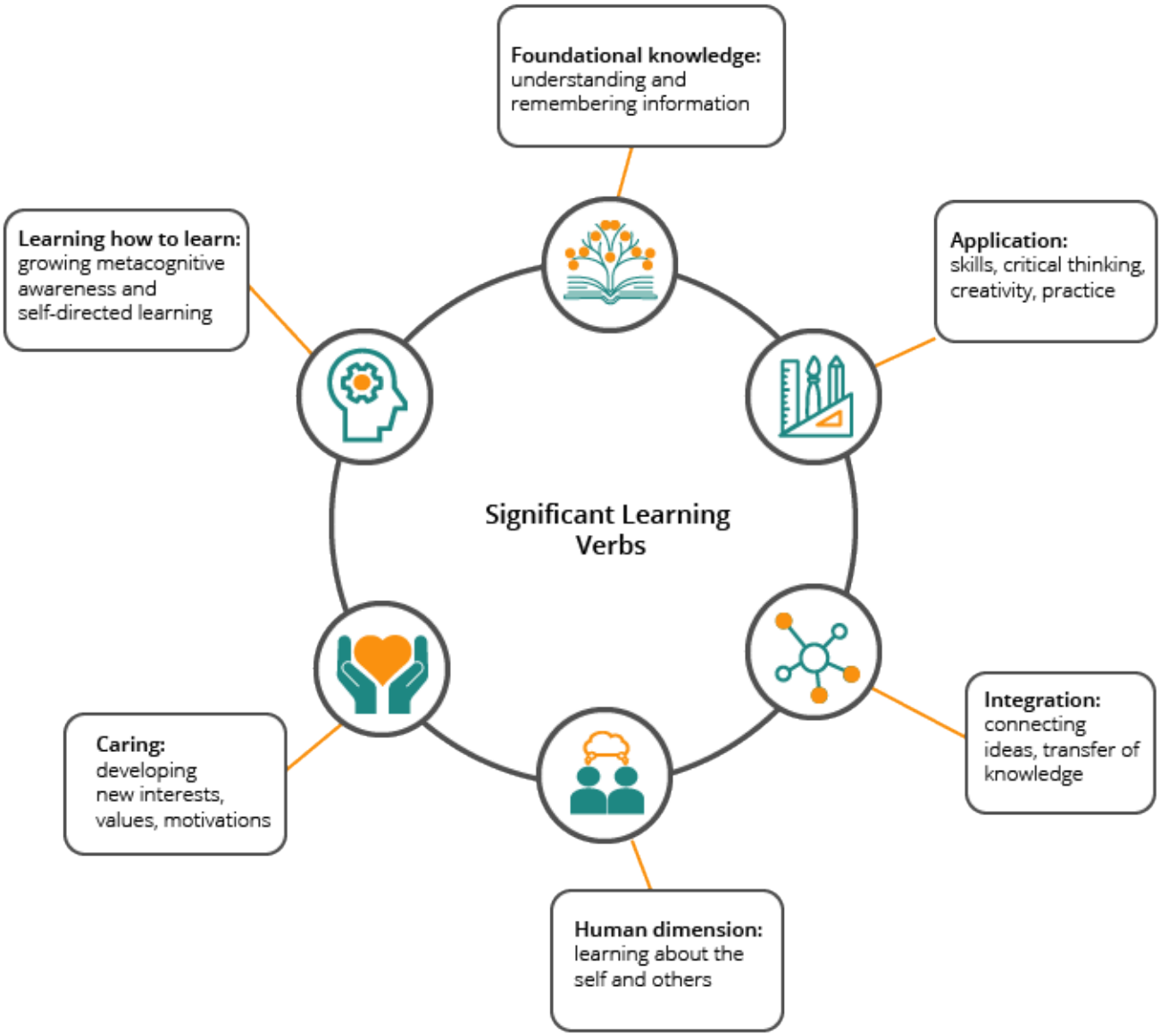


Image Description (PDF) | University of Waterloo

While these form a strong foundation in humanizing the learning experience, there are still gaps in how the relational, emotional, and spiritual aspects of learning privileged by Indigenous ways of learning and teaching are represented.

Visit the following interactive resource which presents a decolonized and holistic approach to developing learning outcomes in the online context using the **Haudenosaunee Four Directions teaching** as a framework on which to incorporate Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning. The interactive tool begins with some educational material to understand the holistic framework and then provides examples of how to address each element and opportunities to attempt your own learning outcomes using this framework.
Incorporating a Holistic Framework in Online Curriculum Development

Creating holistic learning outcomes and rubrics based on Bloom's

taxonomy

Many PSE educators may be more familiar with Bloom's taxonomy of learning. Marcella LeFever provides insightful documentation of her journey towards Indigenizing her classroom practices as a non-Indigenous educator. In her 2016 article, she documents how she found opportunities to incorporate elements of spirituality, honouring, attention to relationships, a sense of belonging, and self-knowledge of purpose to the typical PSE classroom by adapting the traditional three hierarchical levels of Bloom's to the four domains of the Medicine Wheel used by many Indigenous cultures in Canada. She provides a detailed four-domain framework that balances physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual domains of learning. In addition, recognizing that non-Indigenous educators may find it a challenging area, she provides further guidance for documenting progression through the spiritual domain of the framework (LaFever, 2016). This resource could be helpful not only for creating holistic learning outcomes but also perhaps for consideration of a new holistic approach to (circular) rubric design and evaluation.
Switching from Bloom to Medicine Wheel: Creating learning outcomes that support Indigenous ways of knowing in post-secondary education

Going deeper

If you are not familiar with how to use Bloom's Taxonomy to write effective learning outcomes or require a refresher, we recommend the following unit from the ebook, High Quality Online Courses: How to Improve Course Design & Delivery for your Post-Secondary Learners or you can also review section 1.6 Writing effective learning outcomes (Event 2).

Strategies in action: Assessments aligned with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning

Indigenous assessment approaches integrate the epistemological and pedagogical approaches discussed earlier in this section. Some key considerations would be learning activities that are land-based, narrative, intergenerational, relational, experiential, and/or multimodal (e.g., rely on auditory, visual, physical, or tactile modes of learning). While assessments will not be exhaustively covered in this resource, as discussed in Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers, adapting learning activities without changing other aspects of the curriculum is not a holistic approach to Indigenization, and in some cases can result in trivializing and misappropriating those activities. Interweaving Indigenous approaches should involve considering all of the following aspects of your course design:

- **Goals**: Does the course goal include holistic development of the learner? If applicable, does the course benefit Indigenous people or communities?
- **Learning outcomes**: Do the learning outcomes emphasize cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual development? Is there room for personalization, group and individual learning goals, and self-development?
- **Assessment**: Is the assessment holistic in nature? Are there opportunities for self-assessment that allow students to reflect on their own development?
- **Relationships**: Are there opportunities for learning in community, intergenerational learning, and learning in relationship to the land?

- **Format**: Does the course include learning beyond the classroom “walls”?

How to approach this type of work as a non-Indigenous instructor: A criminology case study

Many instructors are new to considering how they may reorient or reframe their course design to engage with decolonizing or Indigenizing efforts. It can be challenging to know where to start.

For your deeper (un)learning and appreciation, click to listen to a podcast featuring Dr. Stephanie Ehret, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Trent University. With her, we explore her (un)learning journey and process of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and worldviews and the beginnings of a decolonization approach into her undergraduate philosophy and criminology course as well as how she creates a safe community for learning about challenging and sensitive topics.

Discussions points include:

1. An overview of her course and the process of why and how Dr. Ehret decided to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and local knowledge into the course structure and material (0:00 – 12:23);
2. How to navigate the challenges and fears one might have when undertaking this type of process for the first time, and overcome them (12:24 – 16:05);
3. Approaches in assignment design and facilitation approaches that aim to create a safe virtual learning environment for learners given the intrinsically challenging and sensitive nature of the material discussed throughout the course
4. Advice for others who are trying to undertake similar processes in their course design work (20:23 – 23:41).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=2805#oembed-4

Transcript (PDF)

Credit: Dr. Stephanie Ehret, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, Trent University

Going deeper

The following resources provide faculty perspectives, approaches, and strategies for Indigenization and decolonization of courses.

What I Learned in Class Today: Aboriginal Issues in the Classroom is a research project that explores difficult discussions of Indigenous issues that take place in classrooms at the University of British Columbia. In the following resource, faculty discuss their perspectives and strategies related to discussing Indigenous issues in the classroom.

What I Learned in Class Today: Faculty Perspectives(commentary and two videos ~ 20 min each; note that transcripts or closed captions are not available for this resource)

Dr. Shauneen Pete provides a commentary for indigenizing and decolonizing academic programs.

- 100 ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing academic programs

The following resources provide more discipline-specific examples:

- Indigenous initiatives in engineering education in Canada: Collective contributions
- Decolonizing computing?

Strategies in action: Connecting to the land in virtual spaces

Virtual learning is often framed as "landless territory" and it can be difficult to conceptualize how one can bring the land, an important part of Indigenous pedagogy, into the virtual space. Indigenous pedagogies emphasize authenticity as a required condition for learning; however, virtual learning can often feel impersonal or detached from students' personal and everyday lives (i.e., there is a gap between "internal" and "external" experiences; Huguenin, n.d.). The nuance of subtle energy generated from self-reflection and openly sharing with others provides a sense of community and interconnectedness that is not often present in most traditional classrooms and is especially difficult to duplicate in online settings (Huguenin, n.d.). A few simple approaches to bridge these challenges are suggested.

Learning about the land

Engage your learners in research about the land they are situated on, should this be at their institution or a place that is significant to them. Understanding which Indigenous territories they are located on, the historical Treaties or other agreement(s) that were enacted as part of colonization, and learning about local languages and culture can help learners connect to their environment.

A starting point for learning about traditional territories include Native Land and Whose Land.

Self-directed interaction with the land

Moving beyond research to learn about the land on which they are situated, virtual learners can be engaged with the land through self-guided reflective exercises and subsequent debrief through a sharing circle. This can be designed as a personal reflection, or, depending on the course topic, (e.g., urban planning, environmental science, biology, geography, agriculture, veterinary science, construction, engineering, language studies, creative arts, business, etc.) such an activity can be adapted to reflect on or interact with elements that learners in all regions would likely be able to access and would at the same time address the intersection of discipline-specific contexts and Indigenous holistic approaches.

For a sample activity that illustrates this idea as a personal reflection, click the following link:
Grounding with the land – A self-directed on-the-land experience (PDF)

Creating course content on the land

As an instructor for the course, an easy way to take the learning outside of the virtual space, is to situate yourself in the environment (when possible). Recording yourself with a smartphone beside a man-made or natural

feature in your community that is related to course content is an effective way to ground learners in the physical world, rather than discussing abstract concepts. Even recording fieldwork or yourself in your workplace can be a helpful, humanizing element to the course.

Remember, no matter how urban a location that we live in might be, we remain connected to the land in the places we live, work, and play, as well as through the water we drink, the food we eat, and the air we breathe.

If it is not possible to record course content outside your office, consider recording a simple welcome message or weekly announcements outside to strengthen your connection to learners and the physical environment.

It is important to acknowledge that through this approach, as a non-Indigenous person, you would *not* be engaging in the practice of land-based learning. This is an entirely different pedagogical approach (commonly termed Indigegogy) and not something that can be appropriated or even considered without extensive consultation with community and Indigenous scholars. This is merely a small suggestion to help humanize and connect your learners to the physical space of the world around them even though the course material is being delivered via electronic methods.

Going deeper

For further support of your learning, **six Indigenization Guides** provide a set of professional learning guides offered by BCcampus as open educational resources. These guides are the result of a collaboration between BCcampus and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training. The project was led by a steering committee of Indigenous education leaders from BC universities, colleges, and institutes, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, and Métis Nation BC. The content in these guides is authored by teams of Indigenous and ally writers from across BC as open educational resources to be used in BC and across Canada. These are highly recommended resources for your own learning, and subsequent use and adaptation to specific contexts. Indeed, we have already highlighted some of their content in this module.

Access the learning guides:

- Foundations
- Teachers and Instructors
- Front Line Staff, Advisors, and Student Services
- Leaders and Administrators
- Curriculum Developers
- Researchers

These open resources are also found in the eCampus Ontario catalogue where you will also be able to find additional courses on Indigenization, decolonization, and associated topics for further in-depth learning.

References and credits

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Huguenin, M. (n.d.). *Integrating Indigenous Pedagogy in Remote Courses*. Teaching and Learning – Trent University. https://www.trentu.ca/teaching/integrating-indigenous-pedagogy-remote-courses

The section 'A quick word on the meaning of the term "settler"' was derived from original by Eidinger, A. and York-Bertram, S. (2019) Beyond the Lecture: Innovations in Teaching Canadian History, 21. Imagining a Better Future: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning about Settler Colonialism in Canada, which is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. The derivative work, 'A quick word on the meaning of the term "settler"' has been adapted through modification of text, images, and headings and retains the CC BY-NC-SA International 4.0 license.

The sections 'Indigenous Epistemologies,' 'Indigenous Pedagogies,' 'An important note on appropriate use of Indigenous Pedagogies' are derived from original by Antoine, A., Mason, R., Mason R., Palahicky S., & Rodrigez de la France, C. (2018) Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers, Indigenous Epistemologies, which is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. The derivative work, 'Indigenous Epistemologies,' 'Indigenous Pedagogies,' and 'An important note on appropriate use of Indigenous Pedagogies' have been adapted through modification of text, images, and headings and retains the CC BY-NC-SA International 4.0 license.

The sections, 'Navigating the Levels of Indigenization', 'Knowing Yourself' and 'Indigenous Pedagogies' are derived from original by Allan, B., Perreault, A., Chenoweth, J., Biin, D., Hobenshield, S., Ormiston, T... & Wilson, J. (2018). Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors, Respectfully Opening Your Heart and Mind to Indigenization and Holding Space and Humility for Other Ways of Knowing and Being, which is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. The derivative work, 'Navigating the Levels of Indigenization,' 'Knowing Yourself,' and 'Indigenous Pedagogies' have been adapted through modification of text, images, and headings and retains the CC BY-NC-SA International 4.0 license.

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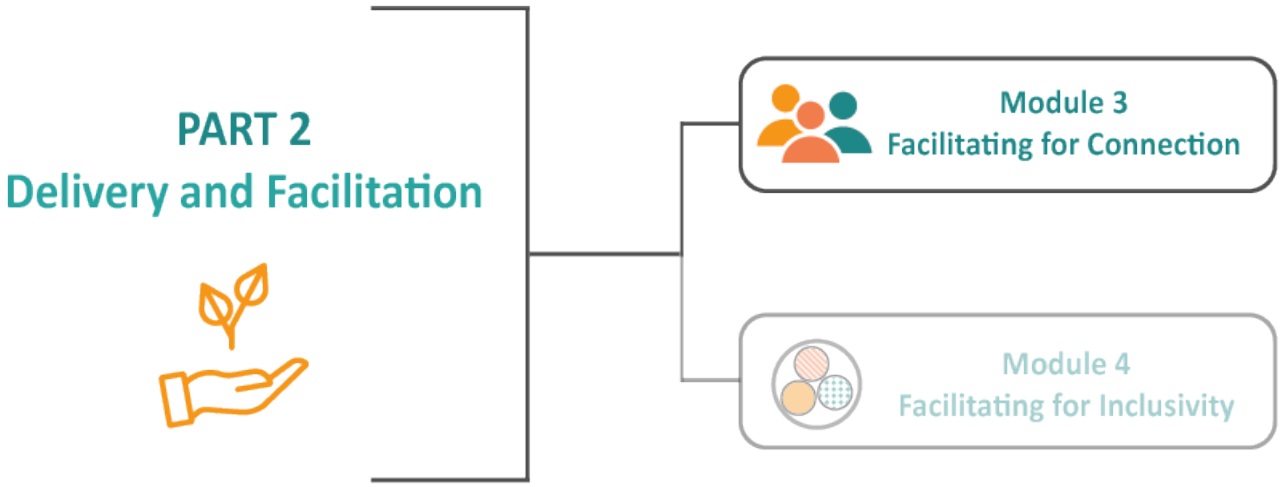
MODULE 3: FACILITATING FOR CONNECTION

3.1 Module overview



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Learning outcomes

What you can take away from this module:

- Strategies to **signal your presence** as an instructor to help humanize your online course.
- A plan to **build a connection** between you and your learners that feels **authentic** to you.
- A few **personalized strategies** you would like to try in the current or next offer of your course and a **schedule** for when you will implement them in term.
- A plan for a **live session** to build community in your course.
- Customized **materials and resources** you can use to humanize your course when teaching during a term offer.

With a well-designed course in hand, you are now ready to get started actively teaching online during a term offer. Many of the most essential opportunities for humanizing your virtual course come in the context of teaching it, whether or not you have designed the course yourself. Ideally the design you are working with has been carefully crafted to support the **dimensions of significant learning** and creates opportunities for your learners to interact with you, the content, and one another (see Module 1). This might not be the case, however, for many reasons, for instance:

- you may not be the course author and can't make changes to the course design,
- you are unable to revise the design of your course right now, or
- it is already the first week of term and you and your learners are already feeling isolated and disconnected and you are looking for some tips (fast!).

The good news is, there are many ways you can humanize and enhance learning through virtual course delivery and facilitation strategies. In fact, research shows that what instructors do in term (presence and interpersonal interactions) has the greatest impact on learner outcomes, relative to other course design factors (Xu & Smith, 2013; Jaggars & Xu, 2016).

In this module you will learn about a number of essential considerations that you will want to keep in mind when teaching your online course (**Key principles**), and you will see a wide selection of examples (**Strategies in action**) to give you a window into what humanizing your online teaching actually looks like in practice. You will also be guided through some activities to help you develop and customize strategies for your own use (**Reflect and apply**) and there are several resources for those who want to learn more (**Going deeper**).

The most essential thing to keep in mind when looking to humanize your online teaching is simply that your learners are all real people with a variety of experiences and backgrounds. They may be taking your course primarily to master a large amount of content, or they may be there mostly to create new ideas and interact critically with existing ones (such as in a graduate seminar), or something in between. But no matter the nature of your course, helping your learners to connect in meaningful ways with the course content, and with one another and you as people, rather than feeling like isolated learning machines, will invariably produce better results for your learners as well as a much more satisfying experience for you as an instructor.

To help get you there, this module will delve into

- some of the ways that you can create a sense of **instructor presence** for your learners online,
- some key considerations for creating **learner-learner interaction** in your course,
- a few tips on some of the things you can do during term to help promote more effective and humanized **learner-content interaction**, and
- finally some of the ways that you can make your **synchronous (live) sessions** most effective if you are using them.

Sections in this module

You can jump to any of the sections in this module by clicking the links below or using the left-side navigation menu.

Strategies in action examples

Below are links to strategies, examples, instructor testimonials, and templates for those who would like to jump right to exploring humanizing principles and strategies in action applied in real virtual courses.

3.2 Instructor presence during term

- Strategies in action: Signalling your presence
- Strategies in action: Sharing your personality and passion
- Strategies in action: Tracking progress
- Strategies in action: Helping learners meet expectations

- Strategies in action: Humanizing strategies that support academic integrity

3.3 Encouraging learner-learner interactions during term

- Strategies in action: Signaling presence in learner-learner interaction
- Strategies in action: Facing challenges in learner-learner interaction

3.4 Supporting learner-content interactions during term

- Strategies in action: Supporting metacognition
- Strategies in action: Keeping learners motivated

3.5 Synchronous (live) sessions

- Strategies in action: Live sessions

Reflect and apply activities

Reflect and apply

Below are links to all the Reflect and apply activities for those interested in diving right into applying principles and examples to their own course design and teaching context.

3.2 Instructor presence during term

- Reflect and apply: Welcome announcement
- Reflect and apply: Communication plan

3.4 Supporting learner-content interactions during term

- Reflect and apply: Teaching checklist

3.5 Synchronous (live) sessions

- Reflect and apply: Plan a live session

Going deeper resources

Going deeper

Below are links to additional resources on various topics for those interested in learning more about a particular topic.

3.2 Instructor presence during term

- What can we do about student e-mails?
- Nicol, D.J. & Debra Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice, *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(2), 199-218, DOI: 10.1080/03075070600572090
- Developing a teaching persona
- Designing authentic assessments
- What is authentic assessment
- Best practices alternative assessments (PDF)
- Revitalizing classes through oral exams
- Using LMS data to inform course design
- Designing remote final exams
- Academic integrity

3.3 Encouraging learner-learner interactions during term

- Quick guide: Netiquette, cultural competency, & professional communication (PDF)
- Managing controversy in the online classroom
- Tips for overcoming online discussion board challenges.

3.4 Supporting learner-content interactions during term

- 21 study tips for online classes success.
- Fostering engagement: Facilitating courses in higher educations, chapter 4c.

3.5 Synchronous (live) sessions

- Using structure to promote equity and engagement in live remote sessions
- Stanford researchers identify four causes for 'Zoom fatigue' and their simple fixes
- Virtual training: 29 tips to maximize your sessions
- Can you flip an online class?
- Flipping your remote classroom

3.2 Instructor presence during term

Key principles: Signalling your presence

In Module 1 we discussed the idea of transactional distance as presented in a seminal article by Michael Moore (1991). If **transactional distance** gives us a way of thinking about the layers of separation that exist between learners and their instructor (or one another) in a teaching context, then **instructor presence** (also called "teaching presence") can be thought of as its opposite. When learners experience your presence as a teacher in their online course through **learner-instructor interaction**, they are much more likely to succeed in meeting your course learning outcome (Garrison, 2000).

Credit: student by The Icon Z from thenounproject.com.; instructor by Ed Gray from thenounproject.com.

Just as transactional distance is something experienced in all courses, though often exacerbated in online contexts, instructor presence should be a consideration in all forms of teaching whether in person or online. However, in the online context it can take a bit more planning to make sure that your learners experience your presence throughout the term. While moments of instructor presence often come naturally for in person learning environments, it can be much easier in an online course to appear distant and disconnected in the eyes of your learners, even if that is not at all your intention.

For this reason, perhaps the most important thing that you can do to help humanize your online course is to signal your presence in the course to your learners consciously and frequently. There are any number of creative ways to do this, and you may well be able to think of some novel approaches on your own. To help get you started, however, here are several of the simplest but most effective things you can do to make sure your learners know you are present in your course and invested in their success.

Welcome announcements

First impressions matter, so start off on the right foot by welcoming learners into your course the way you might welcome someone into your classroom or home. You can welcome learners with a typed message or a personalized home video distributed through the Announcements function present in most Learning Management Systems (LMSs). Some suggested talking points for a useful **welcome announcement** are listed below:

Introduce yourself

Briefly tell learners a bit about yourself and what you are excited about in the course (content or assessments). Try to keep it short, but consider including a hook of some kind to pique their interest. You can direct them to a page in the course syllabus or an About the Instructor or About the TA page where you provide more information about yourself. The more information you provide about yourself, the more likely they are to relate to you, creating that sense of **learner-instructor connection** and piquing interest in the course and content setting the stage for significant learning in the **caring** and **human dimensions**.

Show them around

Help learners quickly orient to the organization and layout of the course. Courses may be organized in different ways that are not always intuitive for learners. Provide them with a quick overview of where they can find critical information in the course (especially the course schedule). If there is a task, activity, or assessment that they must complete in the first week or two (e.g., join groups, introduce themselves in a discussion forum, complete a pre-learning quiz, etc.), point that out for them in your welcome message. Remember, most online courses are self-paced, and without some explicit direction some learners may not really dig into course content until week 2 or 3. There may be opportunity here to be transparent and explain some of your course design decisions, for example why you designed or timed the assessments as you have or why it's important to do the readings before reading/watching the module content. This can help build trust and earn learner buy-in, as well as supporting significant learning in the **learning how to learn dimension**.

Help them feel at ease

Highlight for your learners how they can get help and support from you. What are you committing to in terms of communication and monitoring? What should they expect in terms of email response wait times? It's helpful to set these expectations early. If you have included details about this elsewhere in your course (e.g., the syllabus or a contact information page), point out that this information can be found there.

This first announcement can really set the tone for the course. Take some time to really think it through. Try to keep it succinct and limited to just the very most important details. If the announcement is too long, some of your learners may start to wander off before they get to the end. A warm, clear, and succinct welcome announcement can help quickly orient your learners and reduce anxiety and confusion at the outset of your course, which will get everyone started on the right foot and reducing work (email and clarifying messages) and stress for everyone.

Reflect and apply: Welcome announcement

Take a moment to think through a welcome announcement you might like to write for your next online course, or a script for a video announcement you might wish to record. Keep in mind the above advice, and if you'd like some inspiration jump down to the **Strategies in action: Signalling your presence** section below to see some example announcements.

Now have a go at writing out your announcement or announcement script. You can use the box below to do so.

- Start by listing the goals you want to achieve with your announcement. Be sure to include soft goals like "signal caring" or "help learners feel at ease."
- Next, draft out an announcement with these goals in mind.
- Finally, rate how well you feel you achieved your goals in your announcement.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Enter your goals and type your welcome announcement in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
2. then hit the "**Export document**" button, and
3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#h5p-22

Ongoing announcements

Posting weekly announcements and reminders is a good way to stay engaged and remind learners of your presence. Announcements may contain information that:

- helps learners **engage more deeply** or **relate more personally** to weekly course content and scaffolds metacognition, fostering significant learning in **foundational knowledge, application, integration, caring, learning to learn, and the human dimensions** (more details and strategies on this is covered in the **unit on learner-content interaction**);
- helps learners with soft skills they are still developing, like **time management** (including reminders about due dates) and **study/academic skills** (tips on how to approach assessments, study and writing strategies), supporting the significant learning dimension of **learning to learn**; and
- reminds learners of how and **where they can get support** when they need it and/or when you will be available in the coming week, demonstrating your ongoing presence and options for learners to connect with you.

Announcements serve more than a merely practical purpose, and **their effect on a course can reach well beyond the information they convey**. Announcements are a great opportunity to:

- share something timely,
- signal care and engagement,
- thank learners for their participation,
- congratulate the class on the successful completion of a difficult task,
- comment on progress towards learning outcomes or
- even share a joke or anecdote.

©Photo by Vanessa Garcia from Pexels (Copyrighted image. Do not copy, modify, or redistribute).

When learners read an announcement from you **at least once a week** that signals your clear investment and presence in the course here and now — as it is really unfolding in this particular term for this particular group of learners — your presence is more likely to be visible to them, and their **emotional engagement** in the course is likely to improve. We highly recommend weekly announcements crafted with the same thought and attention to learner experience as your initial welcome message.

Staying connected throughout the term can be **text-based** or you may choose to **use video**, which adds a personal touch and helps to close that transactional distance.

Presence in course forums (discussions)

Many online courses involve forum discussions and other forums of collaboration throughout the term. Signalling your presence in these spaces can be an important way of letting your learners know that you are around and interested in what is going on.

There is always **a balance to be struck with your presence in online forums and other discussions**. On the one hand, your learners will value knowing that you are interested in their conversation and will take a lot from

targeted comments by you, an expert. On the other hand, because you are an expert in the content for your course posting too much can result in a focus on your own posts and can limit the degree to which learners interact with each other. The right balance depends a bit on the purpose and topic of the forum in question.

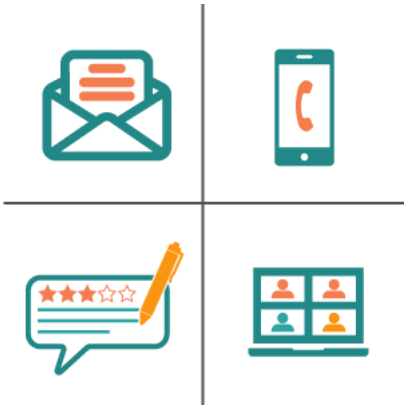
Some approaches to help you **strike the right balance** can include:

- **in STEM and content-heavy courses**, allow learners to collaborate for a while before speaking up to correct clear mistakes and explain where things went wrong, or to signal correct information that learners can note and use for the duration of the course,
- **in seminar-based courses**, allow learners to discuss with little or even no input from you, then revisit the forum or make an announcement at the end summarizing some of what was discussed and signalling the most salient aspects of the conversation from your point of view,
- **in other content discussions**, visit the forum to post questions that spur further inquiry without necessarily sharing your own views on an issue,
- **in discussions relating to group or class projects**, give learners space to collaborate but check in on whether any aspects of the discussion would benefit from clarification from you.

Personal communications and feedback

Individual communications are some of the most important spaces for signalling your presence to your learners. These can include individual

- emails,
- digital meetings,
- feedback on assessments,
- telephone calls, and more.



Credit: email by Anconer Design from the Noun Project, phonecall by Viktor Vorobyev from the Noun Project, digital meeting by Jasreen from the Noun Project, feedback by Annette Spithoven from the Noun Project

Personal communications are a great space for signalling **empathy** and **compassion** for your learners. When speaking just to you, learners are much more free to express what is going on in their lives and with their experience in the course. Responding with warmth and understanding has a huge impact on learners' experience and their overall success in the course. Take extra care to consider the timbre of your written communications. While tone of voice is a crucial way of signalling your care in face-to-face conversations, when communicating in writing this method of signalling is not possible.

Feedback on assessments is an often overlooked space for creating human connections with your learners. While feedback is a specialized form of communication in which you are commenting on the quality of learner work, encouragement and empathy go a long way in helping learners to know that you care about their success. Many LMS systems today also allow you to create **audio or video feedback** for learners, which can often save you time while also allowing your tone of voice and interest in your learners to shine through more organically than it does in text-based feedback. Consider using these systems when marking if they are available. Regardless of how you are doing it, if you keep in mind the person behind the screen and what will most help them succeed, your feedback can become an excellent source of teaching presence in your course.

7 Principles of Good Feedback Practice

Good feedback typically:

1. clarifies good performance (goals, criteria, standards, examples);
2. encourages self-reflection of learning (once assessment is complete);
3. provides high-quality information about learning;
4. encourages instructor and peer dialogue about learning;
5. promotes positive beliefs about self and learning;
6. closes gaps between current and desired performance, and
7. provides information to the instructor to adapt teaching strategies.

Quick tips and tricks: Saving time while giving feedback on learning

If you do not have time to provide learners with substantive or individualized feedback on their assessments there are two great ways to still provide learners with some of the guidance they will need to identify where they may have gone wrong.

Summarize global feedback for the class: While grading assessments take note of some of the key things many learners did well on the assignment as well as patterns in repeated errors or areas for improvement. Share that feedback with the class in the form of a text of video announcement. This will give learners the guidance they need to understand their grade and help them identify where they may have made mistakes and where to focus their efforts to improve.

Grading rubrics: Create a templated rubric that provides learners with categories that provide learners with qualitative feedback, makes for fast grading and will give learners a better understanding of where they did well, where they lost marks, what they were missing, and how they can improve. See sections 1.4. Learner-instructor connection: Designing courses with personality for guidance and example assignment rubrics and 1.6. Learner-learner connection: Designing authentic peer teaching and learning opportunities for an example discussion rubric.

Timely responses

Among the most important things to keep in mind about personal communications is that they should be as **timely** as possible. Some good rules of thumb:

- **Respond to all individual communications within 24 hours** when at all possible. Doing so signals your commitment to the course and your learners' success.
- **For feedback and marking assessments set learner expectations and follow-through**. Make sure your timeline is clear to your learners and stick to it. Make sure your timeline is reasonable for your TAs and you (your energy and morale are important too!), and for your learners if they are expected to use your feedback for another assessment (e.g., feedback on a draft paper to guide their final draft).

Giving learners as many options for communicating as possible is also helpful. Email tends to be the most common way of contacting a course instructor, but other tools like Teams, Slack or even social media may work well for you. In many cases a one-on-one online meeting or an old fashioned telephone call may work best for

you and your learners. Whatever channels you'd like the learners to use, make sure they are aware of them and monitor them appropriately.

Quick tips and tricks: Lightening the email load

Be sure to encourage learners to post general questions to an appropriate course forum, and to reserve email communications for individual issues or personal matters. This helps reduce the problem of getting the questions over and over via email.

If you receive a question from a learner that you think the class will benefit of knowing the answer to, you can also send an email or post an announcement to the course so everyone has the same information to cut down on repeat questions.

Going deeper

This article from the Association for Psychological Science provides a number of tips for handling learner email communications in your course.

- What can we do about student e-mails?

The following article provides more details and summary of guidance on providing formative feedback:

- Nicol, D.J. & Debra Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice, *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(2), 199-218, DOI:10.1080/03075070600572090

Reflect and apply: Communication plan

To help think about how you want to approach forum discussions, personal communications, and feedback in your class, take a few minutes and use the below field to write out a message to your learners about what they can expect in terms of your engagement in each of these areas of the course. For instance:

- How much should learners expect you to participate in course forums, and what kind of participation are you planning?
- Where should learners send different types of questions and requests for the course?
- When should learners expect to hear back from you?
- When should learners expect to receive feedback on assessments?
- What other things should learners be aware of in your communication plan for the course?

How to complete this activity and save your work:

The below interaction has been divided into different spheres of communication to help you organize your thoughts. Type your response to the prompts in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
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3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#h5p-23

Strategies in action: Signalling your presence

Welcome announcement video

Here is a simple welcome announcement for a course in online teaching by Michelle Pacansky-Brock.
Michelle Pacansky-Brock (Video length ~ 2 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#oembed-1

Transcript for Welcome to Humanizing Online Teaching and Learning available on YouTube.

Weekly text-based announcement

Here is a real example of a weekly announcement from an instructor during term.

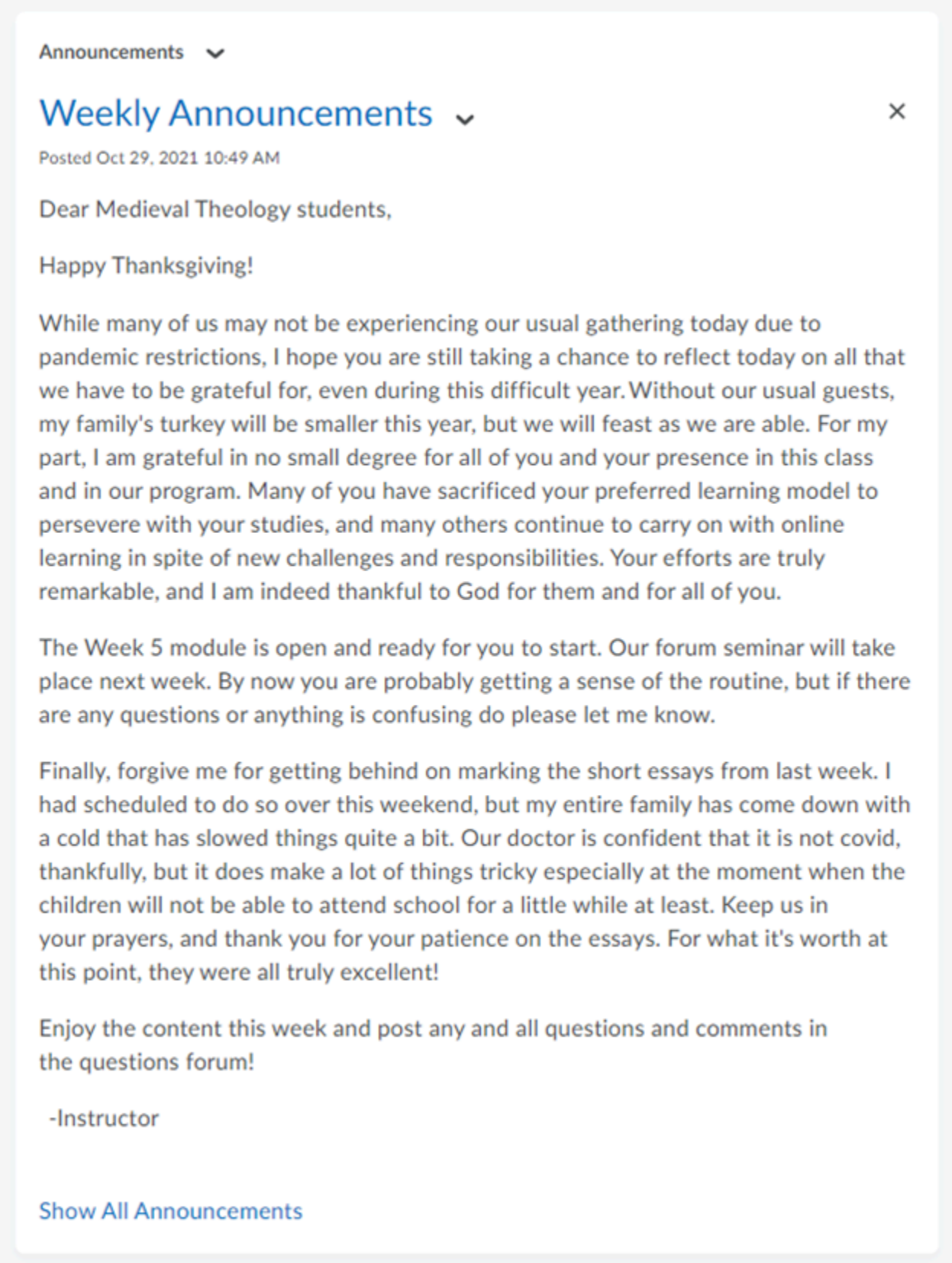


Image Description (PDF) | Credit: Daniel Opperwall, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Weekly wrap-up video announcement

Here is an example of a weekly wrap-up announcement from Michele Pacansky-Brock, a prominent scholar and promoter of humanizing online learning. You will notice how Pacansky-Brock signals her investment in the previous week's discussions.

Week 1 Wrap-up: Humanizing Online STEM Academy (Video length ~ 4 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#oembed-2

Transcript for Week 1 Wrap-up: Humanizing Online STEM Academy available on YouTube.

Key principles: Sharing your personality and your passion

We all have different personalities and teaching styles and you shouldn't feel that you need to conform to any one style. **Authenticity** is important not only for ensuring that you don't spend excessive time editing and sculpting your persona, but also because when interactions online are not authentic, learners see that and appreciate them less. Below are some examples that help to illustrate how different personalities and instructional styles come through. While authenticity is key, we can and should take advantage **of one of the benefits of asynchronous interactions** with learners, which is that it provides **a natural temporal lag that enables us to be more mindful** of what we present to learners and how we respond to their inquiries.

Strategies for bringing your personality into your course

Here are two tips for putting your **best online facilitator self** forward, adapted from Errol Craig Sull (2012):

- **Establish a friendly and inviting personality on day one of class**. You have only one chance to make a first impression, and in the online classroom this is especially true — and important — as your personality on day one can be examined, experienced, and revisited throughout the course. Thus, any postings on day one must convey that you care about the class, the learners, and the subject, and that you are looking forward to the course and are eager to help your learners.
- **Use your interest in the subject to help build your online teaching personality**. You were selected to teach your subject because of your academic and/or professional expertise and interest in the subject, so share it with your learners. Beyond what has been pre-stocked in your course, you can often add articles, pictures, essays, cartoons, interviews, YouTube (and the like) snippets, and factoids that add richness and depth to your subject. The learners will immediately know you really are "into" the subject, and your excitement and enthusiasm will spill over.

Going deeper

It can be tricky to strike the balance between a credible teaching persona and sharing your authentic self. You may be interested in this article that approaches the problem:

- Developing a teaching persona

Strategies in action: Sharing your personality and passion

About the instructor page

Consider creating an “about the instructor” or “about the author” page for your course, like the below example, where you can share a little bit about yourself. In addition, see some of the example announcements above which also show instructor presence and personality in a variety of ways.

Kristin Wilson — Course Author

Background

I completed my PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Toronto, where I taught large undergraduate courses, was involved in training and mentoring TAs, and conducted research on individual differences in attention and memory. I completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Waterloo, studying cognition in online learning environments before I joined the Centre for Extended Learning (CEL) as an Online Learning Consultant (OLC).

Current role and interests

I love the creative and collaborative nature of my role as an OLC at CEL, working closely with faculty and graduate learners across academic disciplines, finding novel and creative ways to bring their online courses to life for their learners. I enjoy drawing on research and what we know about human cognition and learning to optimize online courses and helping online facilitators find their authentic teaching persona online.

Personal

I live in Guelph with my husband, 16-year-old step-daughter, and goldendoodle, Kenobi. When not at work, I

spend most of my time outdoors (hiking, kayaking, gardening, biking, etc.). I also love practising and sharing mindful movement through yoga. I have been practising yoga for about 20 years and teaching yoga for the past 8 years and love that I still feel like a beginner and there is so much to learn and explore.

Key Principles: Tracking learner progress

All modern LMS providers allow at least some degree of **learner progress tracking** (see the strategies in action section below for more about how to track progress in some of the most popular LMSs). Keeping an eye on how often your learners are checking into the course, and how much progress they are making is an essential strategy for creating connection with your learners, especially with those who may be falling behind.

Check in on learner progress regularly during term. When you see learners falling behind, or perhaps never even starting the course, reach out with an email or other communication to check in with how they are doing and **how you can help**. Keep in mind that the purpose is not to call out learners for not keeping up, but to offer support to get them through the course. There are countless reasons that learners may fall behind, from everyday busyness, to major life events like a death in the family, to difficulty understanding materials, to minor or serious mental health concerns and more. Figuring out what is going on with a given learner is the first step toward helping them catch up.

When sending a message to a learner who has fallen behind aim to offer them as much **flexibility** as you can without sacrificing your learning outcomes, and be sure to signal your **compassion** for their situation whatever it might be. Often simply knowing that someone cares is enough to get a learner back on track. In other cases **accommodations** may be in order to assist a learner in catching up. Still other learners may need substantially more support such as through your **campus mental health** supports or **accessibility services**. While you cannot sacrifice the fundamental learning requirements of your course for a struggling learner, knowing that they have an ally in meeting those requirements has a huge positive impact on reducing course attrition and helping all learners to succeed.

Strategies in action: Tracking progress

Learn what kind of data YOUR LMS tracks?

The below links provide information on what type of data you can collect from each of the four most popular learning management systems on the market today. Please select the LMS that your institution uses to learn.

- Canvas: Using Canvas New Analytics to see how students are doing in your course
- D2L: Monitoring Student Progress
- Moodle: Analytics
- Blackboard: Course Analytics and Student Analytics in Blackboard

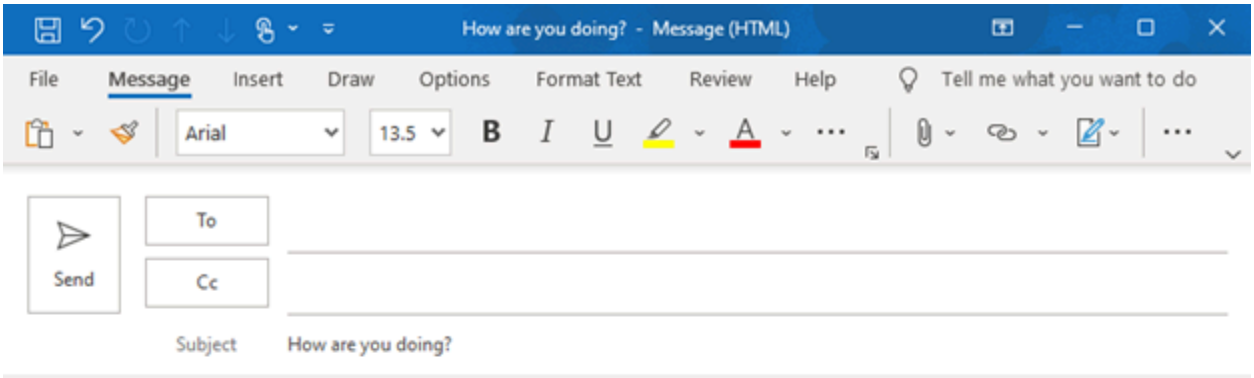
Going deeper

For a deeper dive into the theory and practice of using student data to inform your online teaching, check out this resource.

- Using LMS Data to Inform Course Design

Reaching out to learners who may be struggling

Here is a real example of an outreach email from an instructor during term, with personal details redacted to protect privacy.



Dear Student,

I just wanted to write a quick note to check in on things with the course. I've noticed that a couple of items from you have come in a touch late, and especially that you haven't made very many response posts during our discussion seminars. At the moment, that's left a couple of gaps in your marks so far, and as you're an excellent student I want to make sure your final marks and so forth don't end up getting hurt by that.

I *completely* understand that life is crazy right now for everyone, and I'm aiming to be as flexible as I possibly can about the course this term. So, two quick items on that front:

1) Let me know if there's anything I can do to help with the course at this point, or if anything in particular has been making it more challenging this term. I'm also very happy to meet digitally or have a phone chat if that is useful. If not, that's totally fine also--just whatever is most helpful for you!

2) If possible, I'd like to suggest we make some arrangements to make up for the seminar discussions that you've missed to this point. If you expect it's going to remain challenging to post to the forums, just let me know and we'll figure out a way to make sure the course comes together for you!

Okay, I very much hope this doesn't feel like I'm calling you out. That's not my intention in the least! I really appreciate having you in the course, and I always enjoy your thoughts and submissions. Without a doubt it is a very crazy time these days, and online learning is not ideal for everyone by any stretch, so I want to make sure I'm doing everything I can to help this all go well for you this term.

-Instructor

Image Description (PDF) | Credit: Daniel Opperwall, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Key principles: Helping learners meet expectations

Hopefully you or the designer of your course has made the expectations for learners clear throughout the content, activities, and assessments. However, even in a perfectly designed course learners very often need support in meeting expectations. Feeling like there is someone there to support them with whatever problems they may be having helps learners feel more invested in their learning throughout the term.

In online courses, support can include:

Credit: caring by Tinashe Mugayi from the Noun Project

- **Technical support** solving issues with software and learning tools. In some cases you as an instructor may be able to help learners with technical problems. In other cases you may need to refer them to a tech support unit at your institution. Either way be sure you and your learners know where to turn if they are having problems during term.
- **Clarifications** on assessments and other requirements. Instructions for online courses are not always crystal clear, and this may especially be the case if you did not create or design the course yourself. Make sure learners know where to ask questions about assessments, and make a special point of answering these as quickly as possible to signal your investment in their success.
- **Adding materials** pertaining to difficult concepts, especially when learners seem to be struggling with certain pieces of course content. Although in many cases your course content may be complete before you begin to teach, there are times when a short text or video announcement clarifying certain ideas can be beneficial. While clearing up confusion is important in itself, content-based interventions also importantly signal your presence as an instructor and your care for your learners.
- **Support for mental wellness** and the many other difficulties your learners face outside the classroom. While there are limits to what you can do to support learners in a serious crisis, signaling your compassion and knowing where else learners can turn is crucial in online teaching. See Module 4 of this course for further discussion of mental health and wellness in online courses.

Strategies in action: Helping learners meet expectations

Clarifying expectations video

In this announcement video from Trent University, Blair Niblett clarifies some learner questions while signalling compassion, flexibility and support for the learners as they complete the course.

EDUC 2200H update sept 22 (Video length ~ 3 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#oembed-3

Transcript for EDUC 2200H update sept 22 available on YouTube.

Key principles: Humanizing strategies for improving academic integrity

Credit: hands and heart by Eliricon from the Noun Project, great Minds by Blake Thompson from the Noun Project

The truth is that **academic integrity violations** and cheating often cannot be entirely avoided in any course, including both in-person and online courses. This is especially true in very large courses wherein many of the most effective strategies for reducing cheating are difficult or impossible to implement. In this section we focus on some strategies that help to both humanize your online course and **significantly reduce academic integrity problems**.

First and foremost, the single biggest impact you can have on academic integrity in your course comes from **humanizing** the online learning experience in the first place! In other words, every one of the strategies discussed throughout this course will help reduce cheating during the term. By creating a sense of community in your course, you are helping learners to think of themselves as part of a greater whole rather than thinking only of themselves, which is a central aspect of both the **caring** and **human dimension** of **significant learning**. A sense of commitment to the community helps learners to think about the morals and ethics of their behaviour and notably reduces cheating (Lederman, 2020).

Many other effective strategies for reducing cheating are implemented during the design phase of a course. This can include using multiple lower-stakes assessments, multiple versions of quizzes, algorithmic quiz and test questions, and other familiar strategies. But there are still a few more things you can try when teaching online during term that can help.

- **Be supportive and flexible.** When learners feel that you care about their success, and feel confident turning to you for help if they have fallen behind, they are much less likely to resort to cheating to get through your course.
- **Shift to authentic assessments.** Quizzes and exams can often feel pointless to learners and can be comparatively easy to cheat. Authentic assessments comprise assessments that focus on actively testing learners skills and knowledge in ways that mirror the real-world situations in which those skills and knowledge are applied. Authentic assessments are harder to cheat on and may also help motivate learners more effectively.
- **Consider oral exams.** While probably not possible in very large classes, offering or requiring oral exams either in addition to or instead of written exams can help reduce cheating both by making it more difficult and by helping increase your sense of connection with your learners. For many learners, oral exams can feel less stressful than written ones and your immediate presence helps remind them that academic integrity is harmful to a real person who cares about their success. Online oral exams can be set up using conferencing software or a telephone call.

Going deeper

For more on authentic assessments see the below articles:

- Designing authentic assessments
- What is authentic assessment?
- Best practices in alternative assessments (PDF)

This article provides guidance on using oral exams

- Revitalizing classes through oral exams

Strategies in action: Humanizing strategies that support academic integrity

A personal video to support academic integrity

In this video, Linda Carson of the University of Waterloo shares with her learners the most essential things for them to remember about academic integrity. Clarifications like this one can help reduce unintentional academic integrity violations, which often account for a large percentage of problems.
Academic Integrity (Linda Carson, Continuing Lecturer at UWaterloo) (Video length ~ 5 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1964#oembed-4

Transcript for Academic Integrity (Linda Carson, Continuing Lecturer at UWaterloo) available on YouTube.

Going deeper

This resource from Queen's University provides a deep dive into academic integrity considerations for remote final exams.

- Designing Remote Final Exams

For more information, strategies, and resources to help support Academic Integrity in virtual learning spaces see the following resource from University of Waterloo. Your own institution may also have some great resources.

- Academic Integrity

References and credits

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher eduation. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2-3), 87-105.

Moore, M. G. (1991). Editorial: Distance education theory. *American Journal of Distance Education, 5*(3), 1-6.

Lederman, D. (2020). Best way to stop cheating in online courses? 'Teach better.' Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/07/22/technology-best-way-stop-online-cheating-no-experts-say-better

Sull, E. C. (2012, March 8). Personality matters when teaching online. Retrieved from Faculty Focus: https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/personality-matters-when-teaching-online/

3.3 Encouraging learner-learner interactions during term

Key principles: Fostering social spaces in online courses

Encouraging learner-learner interaction, and creating social spaces in your online courses begins at the level of design. Making sure that your learners will have opportunities to engage with one another in a variety of ways is the most important step you can take to creating social presence in your course. We have covered some of the most important design considerations for social presence in your course in a previous module.

Whether or not you designed your course, however, there are a few things you'll want to keep in mind about learner-learner interaction and social presence while you are teaching during term.

Credit: student by The Icon Z from thenounproject.com.

Discussion forums are like dinner parties, and the instructor is the host. Personally welcoming each student into this new and unfamiliar place and making them feel like they belong in that environment is a necessity to help integrate them socially and academically into the course.

(Hayek, 2012)

As with every aspect of online design and teaching, signalling your presence in the social spaces of your course is crucial for fostering deeper learner-learner interaction and thus humanizing the online course experience for everyone. While social spaces are typically not where most course content is shared in online courses, you still play a crucial role in helping learners to feel welcome and encouraged to participate in every aspect of your online course. **Thinking of yourself as a host**, as in the quotation above, can be helpful for framing your role in encouraging learner-learner interaction during term.

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Your presence and investment in learner-learner interactions can be signalled in a variety of ways. Just a few examples include:

- **facilitating** discussions actively by sharing prompts and questions as the term progresses;
- **actively posting** in discussions and other forums throughout the term (see the next section for more on how much and how often to post);
- **summarizing** key discussions after the fact, whether inside the discussion itself or through an announcement or other message;
- **participating** in social spaces in your online course, such as general chat forums or course-related social media threads; and
- **checking in** on learner interactions, especially group work, to make sure things are going smoothly and to help with any problems that arise.

Giving the right sense of presence in your online course helps humanize the learning environment by **modelling** the kinds of interactions you would like to see between learners, and by setting the **tone** to create comfortable and active spaces for learners to interact.

Balancing your involvement

How much should you post to discussions and participate in other learner-learner interaction spaces in your course? As with so many things the answer is seldom simple, and effective presence in social spaces involves striking the right balance given your learner population, the nature of your course, and your own teaching style.

> Instructors should jump in quickly when they see [a] discussion in the thread is wrong or getting well off track; otherwise hold back for the first week and let the learners have at it. Coming in too early with comments tends to shut down the discussion.
> (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007)

On the one hand, research shows that **more frequent posting by instructors** in course discussions is correlated **to less frequent posting on the part of learners** (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007) which may in part be caused by learners feeling they have less to add to certain conversations after the instructor's opinions have been shared.

On the other hand, sheer **frequency of posting may not be the only thing to consider** regarding the overall impact of various interactions in your course (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007). For instance,

- **sharing accurate information and clearing up learners' confusion** as an instructor has obvious positive impacts on learning even if doing so results in less follow-up discussion, and
- **instructors who post frequently are rated by learners as more enthusiastic** and as displaying greater **subject matter expertise** (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007).

Such perceptions on the part of learners can be useful in creating instructor presence in your course. In short, posting too much can stifle conversation in online classes, while posting too little may make you seem distant and may allow learner errors to go uncorrected.

As you navigate the tightrope act of how much to involve yourself in discussions and similar spaces, consider the **purpose** of a particular interaction or assessments as well as where you are in the natural **life cycle of learner-learner** interactions. For discussions that are meant to encourage learners to get to know one another, as well as those that are more seminar or opinion-based, you may wish to have a lighter touch with respect to your immediate presence. For discussions that focus more on learning content, especially fact-based materials, it may be worth weighing in more often to keep learners on the right track even if they post less frequently afterward.

Strategies in action: Signaling presence in learner-learner interactions

Here is a real world excerpt from a course announcement signalling the instructor's interest in a previous week's forum discussion.

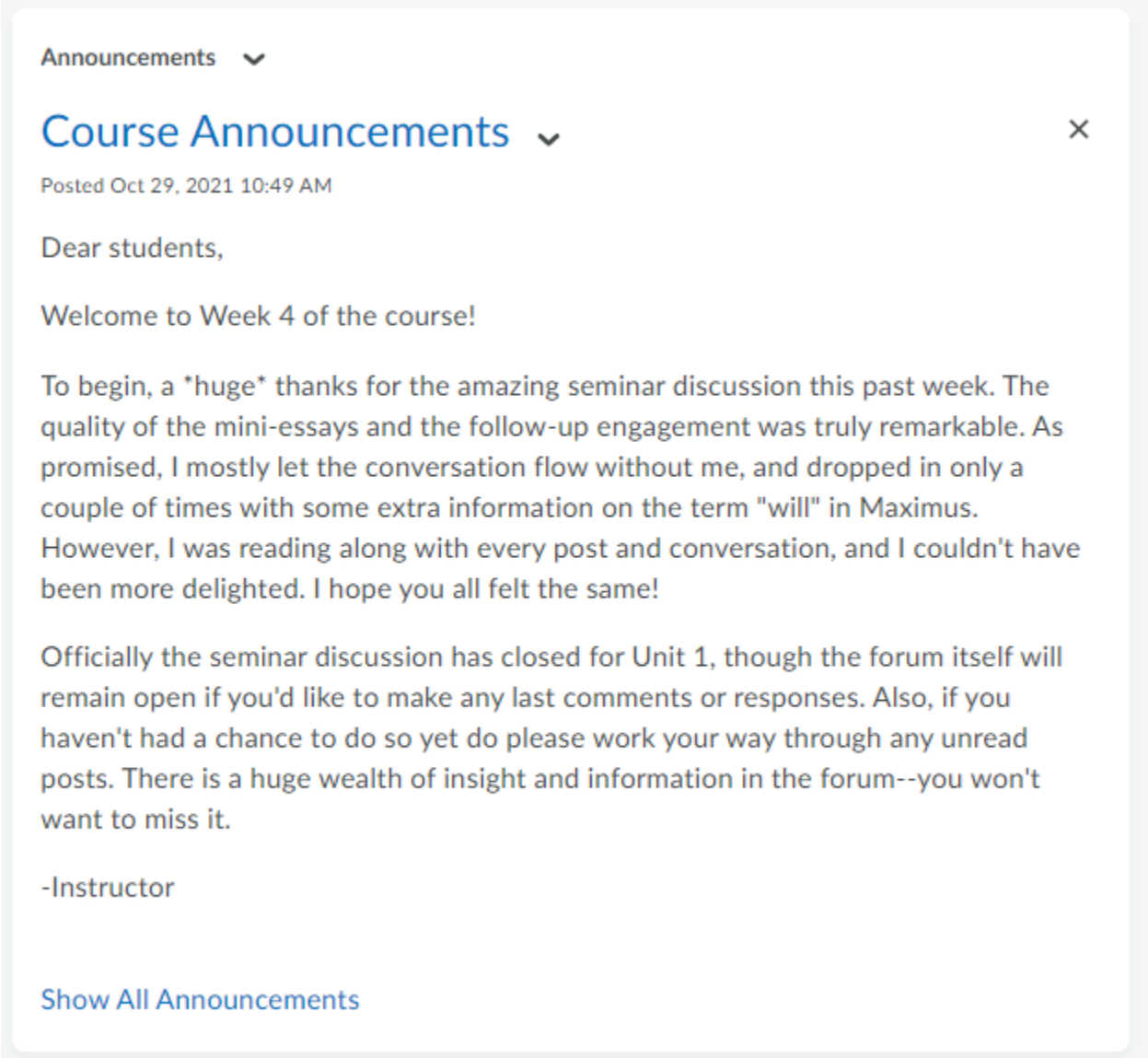

Image Description (PDF) | Credit: Daniel Opperwall, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Key principles: Facing challenges in learner-learner interactions

In the next module, we will discuss some of the EDDI-related problems that can arise between learners in online courses. Here, we will talk briefly about some more everyday social challenges that crop up with some frequency in online courses.

Conflict and poor netiquette

Conflict and disagreement are natural in academic discussions and are not necessarily a problem in online courses when navigated carefully by all parties. However, when conflict heats up to the point that etiquette breaks down, or begins to monopolize a conversation, it can start to be a problem. Asynchronous discussions in

particular can present challenges arising from transactional distance such that learners may read one another's words less generously and with less of the human context than they would have when speaking in-person. When small signals like body language and tone of voice are not available, conflicts can escalate quickly.

One of the most important steps you can take to mitigate conflict in your online class is to make sure your **expectations** for how learners will treat one another in their discussions are extremely clear. Spell out for your learners what good online etiquette (sometimes called "**netiquette**") entails and how you expect them to speak to one another especially when disagreeing. Consider making netiquette a component of learners' participation or discussion marks to further encourage good discourse. If problems still arise during term consider taking some of the following steps:

- **contact** the individual learners involved and reminding them of your expectations and requirements;
- **remind** the class as a whole, in general terms, of your netiquette policies. Never call out specific learners for violations of these policies in public, however;
- **intervene** in a discussion where possible to mediate potential conflict, especially if you perceive a misunderstanding or failure of communication.

In addition, strive to humanize the environment around your course discussions by helping learners **get to know** each other. If possible, encourage or require learners to post photos of themselves and/or aspects of their lives like pets, family, homes and communities as much as they are comfortable. Be sure to spend some time **breaking the ice** at the beginning of your course. And when conflicts do arise, help draw learners back to the mutual recognition of one another as real people with feelings and values of their own. The more human an environment you can create, the less problematic conflict you are likely to encounter in online discussions.

Shallow responses and lack of engagement

Shallow responses and lack of engagement are a common problem in online course discussions. But humans learn best in communities where there is a high degree of energy and engagement with the learning materials. For this reason, encouraging vigorous participation from all learners is a great way to improve everyone's online course experience.

Once again, the most important step to take to encourage participation is to be extremely clear about **expectations** for participation online. Basics like the number of posts required and how often learners need to engage are, of course, essential. Consider digging deeper and providing learners with **further guidance about what makes an effective and engaging discussion** (or other asynchronous) post by providing,

- **clear** rubrics, which help learners to know what you expect;
- **detailed descriptions** of what makes for good posting and engagement, and if possible
- **examples** of good posts that learners can emulate.

If certain learners nonetheless seem disengaged, are posting very little, and/or are only posting short responses like "I agree," reach out to them to see how you can help them to more fully meet your expectations. A lack of participation can be a sign of many things, including a learner misunderstanding requirements, or a learner who has become more broadly disengaged for any number of reasons. With a little help, most learners can get back on track and be a full part of an online course community when they feel fully supported.

Going deeper

This guide to netiquette from Ontario Tech provides a deeper dive into the subject and some practical tips.

- Quick guide: Netiquette, cultural competency, and professional communication (PDF)

These articles from Faculty Focus discuss some ways you can respond to problem conflict in online courses.

- Managing controversy in the online classroom
- Tips for overcoming online discussion board challenges

Strategies in action: Facing challenges in learner-learner interactions

Clarity about your expectations for how learners will conduct themselves in forums and other discussions can go a long way to reducing problem conflict and other issues in your online course. Below is an example guide to netiquette shared in a real course. Feel free to adapt and reuse the guide yourself!

- "Netiquette" for Online Courses (DOCX)

Credit: Daniel Opperwall, Trinity College, University of Toronto

References and credits

Hayek, C. (2012). How many faculty discussion posts each week? A simply delicious answer. Faculty Focus. https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-course-design-and-preparation/how-many-faculty-discussion-posts-each-week-a-simply-delicious-answer/

Mazzolini, M. & Maddison, S. (2007) When to jump in: The role of the instructor in online discussion forums. *Computers & Education 49*(2), pp. 193–213.

3.4 Supporting learner-content interactions during term

Key principles: Enhancing learner-content engagement

Learners are people, not content-learning machines. And while much or all of your course content may have been created well before you start teaching a term offer (and may even have been created by someone other than you), keeping your learners' experience as humans front of mind while teaching allows you to help them have the most success with mastering your course content throughout the term.

Credit: student by The Icon Z from thenounproject.com.; content by Shakeel Ch. from thenounproject.com.

Key principles: Clarifying confusion

One of the biggest roles you can play as an online teacher during term is to identify points of confusion for your learners and help answer questions and clear things up. Points of confusion may involve the business of the course itself (for example details about assessments, deadlines, or digital tools) or may relate to the course content.

Keeping up the avenues of **communication** and human connection is crucial to supporting learners when they experience confusion.

- **Check in** with your learners frequently to get a sense of how things are going and what they might be struggling with in the course.
- **Monitor assessments** to see if there are clear patterns in where learners are making mistakes.
- **Monitor participation** in course activities to make sure learners are meeting expectations, and if they are falling short, see if confusion might be part of the reason why.

When confusions inevitably arise, respond to them with **compassion** and **clarity**. Helping learners feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them can be transformative for their experience in your course. Helping them to understand that they are not alone in struggling with difficult materials helps learners to maintain focus and motivation throughout the course, and to help one another with the challenges of learning.

Key principles: Supporting metacognition

Metacognition is simply thinking about one's own thinking. In the context of humanizing your online courses, encouraging learners to think and strategize about their own learning (through metacognition) helps your learners to stay connected, stay focused, and reach out for help when they are struggling with course material. The development of metacognition is foundational to several **dimensions of significant learning**, but especially the dimensions **learning to learn** and **caring**.

Credit: hands and heart by Eliricon from the Noun Project, thought by emma mitchell from the Noun Project

Modelling metacognition

How do you approach the process of learning and solving problems in your own field? Whether you are an instructor, TA, or other facilitator, you have achieved a high level of success in your area of study or expertise, which means you have learned to learn your subject matter effectively.

Credit: thinking by Ahmed Sagarwala from the Noun Project

If you begin to see an area of substantial confusion in your online course, with many learners appearing to struggle with the same material, consider taking some time to share a friendly description of how you personally might think through the content or solve the problem at hand. Or share how you may have struggled with but were able to learn this particular content yourself. Adding a personal touch to a content problem can help foster more positive **emotional engagement** with the content in question on the part of learners and also provides practical advice for overcoming the hurdle learners are facing.

Teaching metacognition

- **Self-reflection on approach to content**. Consider presenting your learners with questions that help them identify their approach to course content.
- **Engage learners in sharing strategies**. Keep a running list of successful strategies that you or other learners have used to master certain types of content or practices that help learners learn online (see examples below). Share with your learners in an announcement, discussion forum, or via email.
- **Provide formative feedback**. Take time to give quality feedback on any required learning journals or other reflection activities. If none are required and time allows, you can create an opportunity for learners to reflect on their learning and provide guidance by inviting them to create a learning reflection informally and providing (ungraded) feedback.

Going deeper

Some examples for strategies you can share with your learners can be found in the online article 21 Study Tips for Online Classes Success.

For more on metacognition and motivations see Fostering Engagement: Facilitating Courses in Higher Educations, Chapter 4c.

Strategies in action: Supporting metacognition

Video announcement on learning how to learn

In this short announcement video, Michele Pacansky-Brock shares a tip for her learners to help them approach complex materials. You can use short video announcements like these to share similar encouragement and advice with your learners.

How is a module like a watermelon? (Video length ~ 1 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1968#oembed-1

Transcript for How is a module like a watermelon? available on YouTube.

Study tips

Sharing study tips like those in the below article can help boost metacognition and learner success.

- 21 Study Tips for Online Classes Success

3-2-1 activity to support metacognition

Try a 3-2-1 activity, or something similar, to help encourage learners to think more carefully about what they are learning and what gaps still exist in their knowledge. The K Patricia Cross academy shows you how to do this online here.

Teaching Adaptation: 3-2-1 (2 videos ~ 4 mins total with templates and rubrics)

Active reading activities and guidance

Consider including active reading documents to help create teaching presence while your learners work through readings, and to help foster critical thinking as they read.
Online Teaching Adaptation: Active Reading Documents (2 videos ~ 4 mins total with templates and rubrics)

Key principles: Keeping learners motivated

Motivation is a major factor in successful learning and **fuels learner effort and willingness to engage in courageous and significant**. Humanizing your approach to teaching online by reflecting on who your learners are, their goals, and what **piques their interest** allows you to help **support and grow learner** motivation throughout a term offer.

Consider some of the following strategies:

- **Using polls, surveys and interactives** to help learners share their ideas and opinions about course content with you and each other.
- **Drawing connections with real-life applications** for course knowledge. For instance, you might share how you use certain information in your own work or research, or how professionals in a given field rely on certain key skills.
- **Using relatable examples and personal experiences** drawn from your own life to help learners connect with course content.
- **Connecting course content to the news** or current events to show its relevance, or just to share a lighter moment about something related to the class.
- **Sharing your own passion and enthusiasm** for the course content.

Strategies in action: Keeping learners motivated

Consider using a contemporary issues journal or similar assessments to help learners see connections between course materials and the real world.
Contemporary Issues Journal (2 videos ~ 5 min total with templates and rubrics)

Reflect and apply: Teaching checklist

Before we move on to discuss live sessions, take some time to reflect on the materials in this module so far and identify some key strategies that you want to use in your own course.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

You can use the below interactive to record your ideas, then export the document and keep it handy as you teach your next online course. The interactive has been pre-populated with headings for all the strategies discussed so far in this module so that you can jot down specifics about how you might want to employ each strategy in your own context. Your responses will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
2. then hit the "**Export document**" button, and
3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1968#h5p-24

References and credits

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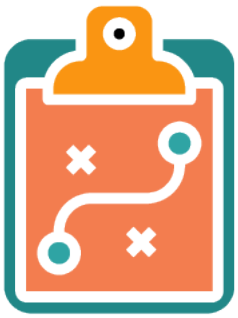
3.5 Synchronous (live) sessions

Key principles: Structuring live sessions

Synchronous sessions are an increasingly popular part of online teaching. While asynchronous courses remain the best choice for many course offerings, synchronous sessions present certain advantages that can make them a good choice depending on your subject matter, course size, and learners' needs. See the **challenges and affordances of synchronous and asynchronous sessions** section in Module 1 to assess whether synchronous teaching online is right for you and your course. If you are going to be using synchronous sessions, then read on!

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the most important step you can take to humanize your live sessions when teaching online is to focus on creating as much **structure** as possible for every session that you teach. While structure is important in classroom teaching as well, it is even more crucial when going synchronous online given the lingering transactional distance of communicating via conferencing, and the markedly different physical and mental experience of attending a virtual class session compared to an in-person one. For instance, to break learners into groups for a synchronous discussion online requires specific planning and tool set up that would not be necessary for a similar activity in the classroom.

Before diving into any synchronous teaching session online, plan out every activity (including any lecturing) that will take place during the session and roughly how long it will take. Then consider the following:



Credit: plan by Komkrit Noenpoempisut from the Noun Project

- **Assess** whether your plan is feasible in the time permitted and identify any set up requirements you will need to attend to (such as creating breakout rooms or enabling polls, etc.). Always ensure to "pad" the components with extra time to ensure you do not over-schedule the session. This allows for space for natural discussions/activities to evolve and end in an more authentic way. Plan a "nice to have" element in case you unexpectedly finish all the scheduled items early (or just end the session early!).
- **Share** your plan with the learners as far in advance as possible so that they can come prepared for the session.
- **Explain** to the learners what preparation will be required before the session begins and why it will be important. For instance, is it essential to complete a certain reading before the live session? If so, why and how will the reading be used in the session?
- **Reduce** the amount of synchronous activity when you can to create shorter sessions. Are there portions of your teaching plan that could be conducted asynchronously instead (see "Key principles: Making the most of synchronous sessions" below).

With a clear plan available to all participants, you and your learners can help maximize live time to create better and more effective social and learning interactions.

Going deeper

This article discusses the importance of structure in online live sessions in more detail and provides some further tips.

- Using structure to promote equity and engagement in live remote sessions

Key principles: Holding attention in live sessions

By now we are all familiar with the phrase “Zoom fatigue.” Though by no means unique to Zoom specifically, the phrase captures the especially tiring nature of attending meetings and live sessions through online conferencing software.

© Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels (Copyrighted image. Do not copy, modify, or redistribute)

Holding your learners’ attention during synchronous sessions begins by recognizing the unique challenges they are facing when attending class online. While research into the problem is in its early stages, it has been suggested that factors like these may all contribute to the tiring experience of video conferencing (Bailenson, 2021):

- **cognitive overload**;
- looking into other people's eyes from **too close** a perceived distance;
- having one's **own image** constantly displayed, and
- being less able to **move in space** when sitting in front of a webcam.

The good news is that there are things you can do to help learners keep their attention and focus during live sessions by recognizing some of these key causes of conferencing fatigue and distraction.

- **Make cameras optional** when they are not truly required for learning. For instance, you might ask learners to turn on their cameras near the beginning of a session to greet one another, and then allow them to turn their cameras back off for the rest of the session or until they are needed again. This can help reduce the cognitive overload on all learners and allows learners to move more freely in space without needing to frame their face in their camera.
- **Shorten and space** your live sessions. Do you need to have the same amount of live time with your online learners as you do with those in the classroom? Or can you adjust some of your teaching plan to reduce the amount of live time to help learners stay focused?
- **Focus on active learning** for your live sessions. More passive forms of learning (like listening to a lecture) can be harder to focus on online. See the **Going deeper** section below for some suggestions about active learning strategies you can use during live sessions, including various group and breakout room activities.

Going deeper

For a deeper dive into the problem of "Zoom fatigue" see this article from Stanford University.

- Stanford researchers identify four causes for 'Zoom fatigue' and their simple fixes

For some more tips on holding attention during live sessions, see this article which focuses on online trainings, but has many applications in post-secondary education.

- Virtual training: 29 tips to maximize your sessions

Key principles: Making the most of synchronous sessions

To help facilitate some of the above approaches to online live sessions, you may want to consider reducing or eliminating the amount of lecture materials presented during live sessions and using **shorter and more targeted live sessions** to create social presence and learner-learner interaction, thereby using synchronous time primarily to help humanize your course while keeping asynchronous strategies for content delivery.

Making the most of synchronous time this way starts by first simply **moving all lecture materials** and other **didactic or passive learning resources** into video or text with visuals format (e.g., lecture notes, slides with notes, or text with images on module pages in your LMS). Posting these materials to your LMS ahead of time allows learners to access these materials whenever it works best for them. This frees up your live sessions for other kinds of interaction and allows learners to easily review lecture materials at their convenience.

With lectures off the docket, next think about what aspects of live online interaction you can make best use of in your particular course. For instance, live sessions can be a great way to:

- **get to know learners** and help them get to know each other,
- **build rapport** with your learners and create social presence within your course,
- **answer learner questions** and clear up confusion quickly,
- conduct certain types of **discussions**, and
- facilitate certain types of **group work** using breakout rooms.

Think carefully about your goals for a given live session and design it to maximize them. In addition, if you are going to deliver lecture materials and facilitate assessments asynchronously, you may be able to **make your live sessions optional**, offering even more flexibility for your learners while still allowing those who prefer to have some live time in their courses the chance to learn in a way that works well for them.

Going deeper

For more on using your live time efficiently by "flipping" your online classroom, see these articles from Faculty Focus and tip sheet from UC Berkley.

- Can you flip an online class?
- Flipping your remote classroom

Strategies in action: Live sessions

Tips and example plans for synchronous sessions

Check out these resources from Boston College and University of Washington which contain more tips on synchronous sessions, and example plans for a synchronous course session.

- Planning an Online Synchronous Session
- Templates for Engaging Synchronous Online Classes

Community-building and check-in

Instead of diving into synchronous sessions right away, take the first 5-minutes to check-in with your learners. Some wellness checks could include:

1. creating a slide with 4-9 different numbered images (e.g. animals, foods, places you wish you could visit, TV show or movie posters, etc.) and ask learners to type the number **matching their mood** in the chat;
2. guiding learners through a **mindfulness exercise**, such as asking learners to pick a non-technology object in the space that they are in and take a minute to simply look at that object and its characteristics. After the exercise ends, get learners to share an element of the object that they focused on the most. (e.g. its roundness, softness, the colour, etc.);
3. guiding learners through a **mindful breathing** activity of a minute or two, taking in deep breaths through their nose and out through their mouth. Encourage learners to focus only on their breathing. After

complete, perhaps put up a few numbered images as of 'moods' to get a sense where learners are at (see item 1 of this list); and
4. having students provide **"weather reports"** comparing the weather outside where learners are to the "weather" inside and how they are doing overall.

The below video explains some of these concepts in further detail.
Showcase 2021: Individual student check-ins (Video length ~ 12 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1970#oembed-1

Transcript for Showcase 2021: Individual student check-ins available on YouTube.

Credit: Colleen Davison, Public Health Sciences / Global Development Studies, and Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

These types of activities will help everyone understand how everyone is feeling and will help you understand the engagement level with more empathy. For example, if many of your learners are in the middle of midterms and they select a "tired" or "stressed" related image, you can tailor your tone and expectations for engagement for the session with that in mind. As an added benefit, learners joining late will not miss any critical information in the first few minutes of the session (sometimes people lose track of time or the technology/internet does not want to cooperate and we can recognize that).

Strategies to reduce cognitive load: The twenty-minute rule

To help learners focus, pause every 20 minutes or so to check-in with understanding or start on a different topic to retain attention and ensure learners don't get lost. This would be a good time, for learners to contribute to collaborative learning (e.g. Padlet, Mentimeter, built-in polls in conferencing software, Google doc) to check-in in terms of their ideas, predictions, gained knowledge so everyone knows what people are thinking. After 40 minutes, consider a short wellness break where learners are guided through mindful breathing, have a minute to stretch their legs, or engage in some chair yoga (yes, it is a thing!). If learners are working in break-out groups, after 20 minutes it may be a good idea to bring everyone together and start sharing what they have discussed/ created or have a short 5-10 minute session where more information is given to them before going back to break-out groups. This will help learners remain engaged and not leave their desks during these extended times.

Synchronous session engagement strategies

This video from Queen's University highlights several more techniques for engaging learners during live sessions including learner-led discussions and participation groups.
Showcase 2021: There and back again (Video length ~ 15 min)

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1970#oembed-2

Transcript for Showcase 2021: There and back again available on YouTube.

Credit: Grahame Renyk, Dan School of Drama and Music, and Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

Reflect and apply: Plan a live session

For this activity, use the below interactive to create a specific plan for your next synchronous session (you can skip this activity if you are teaching only asynchronously).

- Begin by briefly summarizing the purpose of the live session you are planning. What are you hoping the session will add to yours and your learners' experience in the course?
- What learning outcomes will the session help you address?
- Will the session help to create teaching and/or social presence in the course?

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Use the fields to create an outline of exactly what you would like to do in the session. Be as specific as possible, and designate how much time you expect to take on each portion of your session. You can save the resulting document for your planning purposes. You may also wish to share the document with your learners so that they can make the most of your session together. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
2. then hit the "**Export document**" button, and
3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

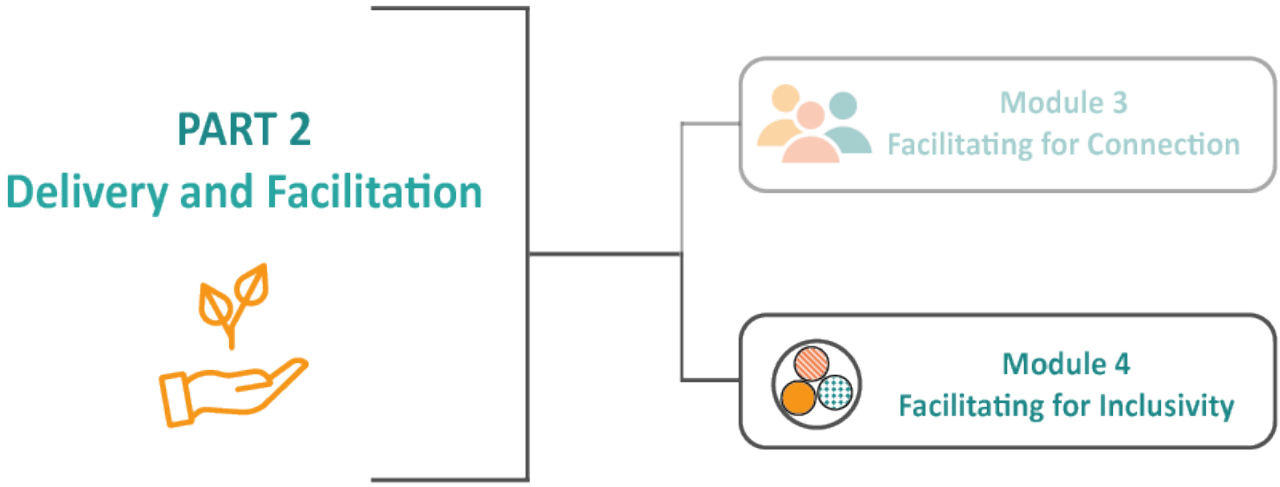
An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=1970#h5p-25

References and credits

Bailenson. J. N. (2021). Nonverbal overload: A theoretical argument for the cause of Zoom fatigue. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior 2*(1) https://doi.org/10.1037/tmb0000030

MODULE 4: FACILITATING FOR INCLUSIVITY

4.1 Module overview



University of Waterloo

Learning outcomes

What you can take away from this module:

- The ability to **identify** and **apply** principles of **inclusivity**, **diversity**, **and/or equity** to humanize how you facilitate your course.
- Confidence in how to **navigate sensitive topics** and **create safe and brave spaces** in online discussion with **trauma-informed communication strategies**.

This module sets out key principles and applicable strategies for facilitating an inclusive learning environment to help learners feel respected and connected to each other and engaged in course concepts/content, activities, and assessments as they learn during the term. Whether you are the designer and author of the virtual course you are teaching or not, this module will provide you with facilitation strategies that help to build an inclusive learning environment throughout the term, which do not require you to change the content or design of your course. If you do have control over the design of your course, we suggest that you start with Module 2. Designing for inclusivity, for foundational **Key principles** and **Strategies in action** that bake inclusivity into the design of your virtual course.

Concepts covered in this module include equity, diversity, decolonization, inclusion (EDDI) and sensitive (trauma-informed) strategies that set an example for learners and the tone for your course, including:

- cultivating an inclusive community through modeling inclusive interactions and an accessible course structure;
- considering how academic conventions can be interrogated for inclusivity;
- implementing best practices for authentic and brave course discussions and how to address controversy

in virtual learning environments; and
- identifying and dealing with content warnings, disclosures, and microaggressions.

The strategies outlined in the module provide tangible examples of what humanizing your online teaching can look like in practice and can be implemented by instructors or teaching assistants as a course is being offered, without the need to adjust course content.

Sections in this module

You can jump to any of the sections in this module by clicking the links below or using the left-side navigation menu.

Strategies in action examples

Below are links to strategies and examples for those who would like to jump right to exploring humanizing principles and strategies in action applied in real virtual courses.

4.2 Modelling inclusive behaviours during term

- Strategies in action: Modelling EDII principles in interactions with learners
- Strategies in action: Implement common academic conventions with inclusivity in mind
- Strategies in action: Embracing inclusivity through an accessible teaching approach

4.3 Inclusive facilitation practices

- Strategies in action: Building course structures that create safe spaces for class engagement
- Strategies in action: Managing controversy in virtual class discussions
- Strategies in action: Considering facilitation practices that respond to the needs of your Indigenous learners

4.4 Trauma-informed approaches

- Strategies in action: Cultivating a safe space
- Strategies in action: Building safe spaces with collaborative charters
- Strategies in action: Providing content warnings
- Strategies in action: Additional strategies for facilitating sensitive topics
- Strategies in action: Responding to learner disclosures
- Strategies in action: Sexual violence disclosures
- Strategies in action: Disclosures from Indigenous learners
- Strategies in action: Respectful discussion of populations experiencing marginalization

4.5 Addressing microaggressions in virtual learning contexts

- Strategies in action: Recognizing and responding to microaggressions

Reflect and apply activities

Reflect and apply

Below are links to all the Reflect and apply activities for those interested in diving right into applying principles and examples to their own course design and teaching context.

4.2 Modelling inclusive behaviours during term

- Reflect and apply: Do academic conventions serve your learning outcomes?
- Reflect and apply: Course accessibility checklist and plan

4.5 Addressing microaggressions in virtual learning contexts

- Reflect and apply: Extending your own power flower
- Reflect and apply: Responding to microaggressions in your own virtual learning environments

Going deeper resources

Going deeper

Below are links to additional resources on various topics for those interested in learning more about a particular topic.

4.2 Modelling inclusive behaviours during term

- Whose Land
- Native Land
- Beyond territorial acknowledgements
- 'I regret it': Hayden King on writing Ryerson University's territorial acknowledgement
- 1.2 Virtual learning contexts and virtual learners,
- LMS templates:
  - **Brightspace**: Brightspace HTML Template (version 3.0)
  - **Canvas**: Humboldt State University: Designing your course with modules and pages
  - **Moodle**: Moodle course templates
  - **Queen's University, Brightspace**: Create a course
  - **Trent University, Blackboard**: Blackboard – Faculty – Template
  - **University of Toronto, Canvas**: Example remote/online course template – University of Toronto
  - **University of Waterloo, Brightspace**: Online course templates
- Creating Accessible Documents
- Web Accessibility for Designers
- Image Description

- Accessible Math

4.3 Inclusive facilitation practices

- Questions for a Socratic Dialogue (PDF)
- Equality and diversity: An example of Socratic questioning

4.4 Trauma-informed practices

- Trauma-informed practices for post-secondary education: A guide (PDF)
- Respect, not censorship: Students weigh in on the trigger warning debate
- Trigger Warnings
- An introduction to content warnings and trigger warnings (PDF)
- Guidelines for talking about difficult topics in a remote course
- Responding to disclosures on campus
- Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience (PDF)
- Holding our ground: Indigenous student post-secondary persistence & early leaving (PDF)
- Talking complicity, breathing coloniality: Interrogating settler-centric pedagogy of teaching about white settler colonialism

4.5 Addressing microaggressions in virtual learning contexts

- Documentation: Inclusive Teaching/Microaggressions in the classroom
- Microaggression in the classroom (PDF)
- Microaggressions in the online classroom

4.2 Modelling inclusive behaviours during term

Key principles: Modelling EDII principles in interactions with learners

In a virtual course, the reality is that there are a finite number of interactions an instructor can reasonably have with learners.

You may communicate over email or in virtual office hours with some learners several times in term. At the same time, you may never interact directly with other learners, perhaps because they are confident in the guidance they receive from the course content and assignment instructions. Learners may be additionally confident from the guidance they receive from your course announcements, and the assignment feedback you deliver as the course progresses. If you have synchronous sessions, you may or may not engage directly with all learners depending on class size.

The good news is that regardless of what your learners need from you as an instructor, the asynchronous nature of virtual teaching offers an increased ability for you to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment during term.

Strategies in action: Modeling EDII principles in interactions with learners

Module 1.4 Learner-instructor connection: Designing courses with personality outlines several strategies for designing interactions that emphasize quality over quantity. If you have not had the chance to review this section, we encourage you to explore the following strategies as ways to create an inclusive, humanized, and authentic environment that does not rely on the need to modify course content:

- Let them 'see' you
- Recognizing your power: To help or to harm
- Strategies in action: Introducing yourself, the course, and welcoming learners
- Strategies in action: Providing learners with your professional perspective
- Strategies in action: Modeling and inspiring connections with your learners

We further recommend that you review Module 3.2 Instructor presence during term as it is foundational to the approaches discussed in this module. The strategies outlined there provide an excellent equity, diversity, and inclusion foundation on which you can further build in this module. If you adopt those approaches, you can build your confidence in facilitating an inclusive environment.

Here, we offer additional, yet simple, ways to further build an inclusive virtual community through your communication strategies with learners.

Offer a land acknowledgement

In the context of a course that you have been tasked to facilitate, it would be extremely unlikely for you to have the scope and/or capacity to significantly redesign or work to decolonize the organization, content, and delivery of the course. In such a context, such work would likely be inappropriate and ultimately lead to tokenism.

While online learning is often framed as "**landless territory**" (Huguenin, n.d.), **offering a land acknowledgement** is one small step that you can do to **reconnect your learners to physical space and place**, regardless where they might be. It is also a way to signal to your learners through your syllabus and, your dedication to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action in the context of post-secondary education in general, and your discipline specifically. This can be done on a dedicated page of your learning management system (LMS) or in a welcome announcement (text- or video-based).

A land acknowledgement is an intentional and sincere message of acknowledgement of the ancestral holders and owners of the land one finds oneself upon.

It is a sign of respect to acknowledge the land you are on and to acknowledge the people for welcoming you there or allowing you to be there

(Office of Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.)

Many institutions have crafted institutional land acknowledgements, and this is a good place to start. However, these land acknowledgements **should not be read just as statements**; they should be **personal and sincere, self-reflective**, or guided by **intended action**.

For example, you might share:

- how you relate to the land and others around you,
- aspects of your own reconciliation journey, or
- the kinds of actions you've committed to personally or professionally with regards to reconciliation.

In this way, land acknowledgements are a small but welcome gesture that help encourage your learners to think about their own relationship to Indigenous peoples, the land, and reconciliation.

As we engage in processes of reconciliation it is critical that land acknowledgements don't become a token gesture. They are not meant to be static, scripted statements that every person must recite in exactly the same way. They are expressions of relationship, acknowledging not just the territory someone is on, but that person's connection to that land based on knowledge that has been shared with them.

(Lindsay DuPré, Metis Nation)

Credit: Whose Land

Consider this example of a land acknowledgement

Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in this virtual space, we recognize that we are connected with one another through the winds that blow air into our lungs and through the waters that move deep into the earth and up into the sky. We acknowledge that the ground beneath our feet is historically the home of Indigenous Peoples, many of whom have been forced to leave for other lands. We offer our gratitude to the First Nations for their care for and

teachings about the earth and our relations. If you know the name of the territory that you are learning from, please put it in the chat.

Credit: Natalie Dempsey and Janice MacKenzie, Instructors, Trent University School of Education, text adapted from Kate Trigger Duffert

Going deeper

Crafting appropriate land acknowledgements requires skill, and it is recommended you do further learning on the topic; some institutions offer workshops regarding land acknowledgements. You may be interested in reviewing Module 2.6 The road to decolonizing and Indigenizing a virtual course for foundational knowledge on the relationship between Indigenous Peoples in the place we call Canada and our commitments as educators to reconciliation.

Whose Land and Native Land offer detailed maps outlining Indigenous territories and languages, as well as treaties, to help you situate yourself, wherever you may be.

Please note that land acknowledgements are not without their critiques. For your further learning, two articles are suggested:

- Beyond territorial acknowledgements
- 'I regret it': Hayden King on writing Ryerson University's territorial acknowledgement

Adjust your email signature

You may consider adding new elements to your email signature to signal to your learners the values and principles you strive to embody in one-on-one communications, and by extension, your course. A personalized email signature shows that you are a real person, and helps to diminish the transactional distance between you and your learners when they reach out specifically to you.

For example, you may consider:

- adding your **preferred pronouns**;
- including an **equity or accessibility statement** (for example, one provided by your institution or one inspired by it);
- if you use **dictation** to compose your emails, adding an **explainer notice** for this to account for any transcription errors that may inadvertently occur. This has the added benefit of sensitizing your learners to this alternate way to interact with their technology;
- including a **personalized land acknowledgement**, or, if you are not yet comfortable crafting your own, using your institution's land acknowledgement or affirmation.

Acknowledge real-world events in your communications

Your learners are not learning in a vacuum. They likely have other studies or work responsibilities as well as personal lives that affect how they might be able to interact with and engage with your course in different parts of the term. You are likely familiar with the fact that emergencies arise or that personal health or disabilities may require accommodation (understanding and responding to learner disclosures will be explored in Module 4.4).

Additionally, other local, regional, or world events may similarly have an impact on your learners. For example, natural disasters in areas where learners may be living may be impacting them directly, or geo-political unrest may be weighing on learners who have family in that area of the world.

As a matter of practice, you may connect world events or news items in your weekly announcements to provide professional commentary as it relates to course content. From time to time, however, you may feel personally connected to, or know your learners are connected to, a particular event in the news. **Providing a brief note acknowledging the reality of the world and that it may be a challenging time for some in the class**, and offering to negotiate with learners who may need additional time on assignments as a result, creates an authentic and humanized environment where learners understand they will be heard if they choose to speak up.

You may not always know what events might be important to your learners, however by broaching this type of communication, even once, you can build strong foundations for authentic and brave relationships with them during the course. This strategy might occur naturally when engaging in in-person teaching, however, in the virtual space, this approach needs to be more intentional.

Going deeper

To get to know your learners better we recommend 1.2 Virtual learning contexts and virtual learners, along with the activities Getting to know your learners and Getting to know yourself and your course as ways to learn more about your learners.

If you are interested in creating a pre-course survey to help you focus your facilitation strategies during term, we recommend the What do my learners already know? activity and worksheet found in the open textbook High Quality Online Courses.

In this example, the instructor wanted to acknowledge the first National Truth and Reconciliation Day by changing course readings for the week. In this case, the class size was small and there were synchronous sessions every week. In order to democratically determine how to incorporate the day into class plans, he opened a discussion with the class via an email to see what they wanted to read and discuss to mark the occasion. For the instructor, the complexity of conditions offered a great heuristic for reflecting on how to structure a class in a way that provides recognition and space for diversity, yet also harnesses it to enrich the whole classroom collective. Presented is an excerpt of this communication.

Example 1:

Hi Class,

As many of you already know, Thursday, September 30th, 2021 will be the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This day is intended to recognize and commemorate all of the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children who lost their lives or were otherwise victims of the Residential School system, as well as their families and communities who were, and continue to be, affected by this horrible injustice.

We can discuss this in class this week and figure out what we want to do the following week, even though our class is the day after. I was thinking of perhaps changing the reading by Sikes and Piper to something more relevant to this day, such as a study on the experiences of residential school survivors. Please alert me if you know of a work suitable to this topic and our class.

Credit: Dr. Angus McMurtry, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

In this example, the instructor sends weekly announcements via email. In this particular case, the announcement came around the same time as intense flooding was happening in British Columbia in late 2021. Although the course was being taught from an institution in Ontario, the instructor had personal connections

to the region and knew some learners lived in BC. In her email she offers acknowledgement of the situation and offers her support to any learners who may be struggling as a result. Presented is an excerpt of this communication.

Example 2:

Good morning,

I hope you had a wonderful weekend despite this very hectic time of year. I have a few updates for you on this beautiful Monday morning and I do apologize ahead of time for the lengthiness of this announcement.

For those of you who live in BC or who have any friends and family affected by the flooding, know that I am thinking of you. If you have concerns about term coursework and/or deadlines, reach out to me as soon as you are able to.

I also want to check in and ask, how are you doing? Are you feeling good about the time you have to prepare for your final video podcast? Does module 10 feel overwhelming to complete alongside your podcast? Reach out to me via direct message if things are feeling heavy.

Credit: Dr. Jamilee Baroud, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Key principles: Academic conventions and inclusivity

Higher education courses involve a range of academic conventions that structure the learning environment. By "**academic conventions**" we mean things like:

- mandatory attendance (or asynchronous time-on-content),
- due dates,
- timed assessments, and
- many other obvious and/or subtle course conventions or practices.

Some of these structures may be carefully designed to facilitate the learning outcomes identified for the course, while others may be implemented based on administrative or logistical restraints that are external to the course's learning outcomes. The ones that we need to be concerned about are those that have arisen purely from longstanding tradition.

Virtual learning environments are less steeped in tradition than face-to-face PSE learning, but there are still academic conventions that play out in virtual learning. In Module 2.5 Learner mental health and wellness in virtual courses, you were asked to rethink the value of "**rigour**" in PSE as a driver of academic conventions. It was noted in that section that there can be a tendency for course elements to be designed to emphasize challenge and/or personal discipline in ways that may not be directly connected to the course's learning outcomes, and that such conventions have the potential to be exclusionary or uninviting to students. Exclusionary conventions built into the design of a virtual course or broader institution can either be escalated or reduced by the way the instructor facilitates the course.

Strategies in action: Implement common academic conventions with inclusivity in mind

In thinking about humanizing learning for inclusivity through virtual course facilitation, one effective strategy is to take stock of conventions in the course that may exist for no reason connected to course learning

outcomes, and to assess whether such conventions have the potential to exclude learners. Sometimes these conventions are built into the design of the course, but the instructor of record may be in a position to offer students flexibility by strategically modifying the design as a course unfolds. The following section shows examples of potentially exclusionary conventions with explanations for how exclusion might be created, as well as suggested alternatives that create potential for inclusivity.

Attendance at synchronous class sessions or meetings

How exclusion may be created: Potentially difficult or impossible to attend for learners juggling work or family commitments, or both.

Stressful for learners who may be learning virtually across time zones, or who don't have strong internet connections.

Possible alternative if convention is not tied directly to learning outcomes:

Can learning outcomes be achieved by offering in-the-moment opportunities for asynchronous engagement that maintains the same learning opportunities? (e.g., instructor offers opportunity for completion of critical reading journal rather than virtual seminar participation).

Inflexible due dates

How exclusion may be created:

Learners managing multiple life commitments may struggle to meet inflexible instructor-imposed deadlines.**Possible alternative if convention is not tied directly to learning outcomes:** If deadlines are not tied to learning outcomes (e.g., scaffolded learning within the course, timed feedback needed for course next steps), consider alternatives like:

- contracted deadlines where learners indicate at course startup when they will submit various assessment tasks;
- flexible deadlines where learners are offered a window of time in which course components may be submitted.

Both of these alternatives allow learners flexibility in planning learning around other life commitments while still emphasizing accountability for demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes.

Penalties for late submission

How exclusion may be created:

Grade deductions for late work penalizes learners for non-adherence to course timelines, but may be totally unrelated to learners' demonstration of learning outcomes of a particular assessment task.

Possible alternative if convention is not tied directly to learning outcomes:

Consider a "grace period" during which late penalties are suspended, perhaps timed to the return of feedback to those learners who submitted on time (i.e., late penalty only applied after initial batch of grades/feedback are released to learners).

In our calls to review academic conventions and consider whether these traditions may exclude or disincentivize engagement in a course, we want to clarify one point, and recognize two barriers to implementing these suggestions.

Revising academic conventions: Proceed with caution!

To clarify, **every academic convention exists in its own specific context**. Our intention here is not to encourage the elimination all traditional conventions in PSE, but rather to interrogate whether those conventions are legitimately tied to course and credential learning outcomes. There are some cases where academic conventions have important functions that serve important learning outcomes (e.g., the requirement to test nursing students' medication dosage calculations under time constraints, because there is a functional need to perform such calculations under pressure in professional practice).

("Caution" icon by ProSymbols, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.)

Revising academic conventions: Barriers to consider

Some structural barriers exist to our guidance in this section.

First, we recognize that **not all course instructors have full academic freedom to make in-the-moment adjustments** to course design.

Second, most academic conventions have developed over the many centuries that post-secondary institutions and academic and professional disciplines have existed. Therefore, we recognize that these **conventions can be deeply engrained, and may be difficult to adjust or eliminate immediately**. This is especially true where change requires additional funds to support an alternative instructional approach, or where a significant collective shift of andragogical mindset is required before change can be universally implemented. In such instances, inclusively-minded instructors may work "behind the scenes" to effect change, while they use professional judgement within their sphere of influence to provide learners with support and compassion to promote learning.

("Barrier" icon by James Kopina, from the Noun Project. Used under CC BY 3.0 license.)

Reflect and apply: Do academic conventions serve your learning outcomes?

Think about a virtual course that you teach, and some of the academic conventions that may play out in that course which might be extraneous to learning outcome identified for the course. Can you think of any alternatives to these practices that might be more inclusive of all your learners?

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Use the following response tool to record two conventions that are part of your instructional practice, and possible alternatives.

Your responses will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below:

1. Navigate through all tabs or jump ahead by selecting the "**Export**" tab in the left-hand navigation,
2. then hit the "**Export document**" button, and
3. finally hit the "**Export**" button in the top right navigation.

To delete your answers simply refresh the page or move to the next page in this course.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=3310#h5p-42

Strategies in action: Embracing inclusivity through an accessible teaching approach

Though you may have limited influence on the overall selection of resources and design of content delivered in a course that you have been tasked to facilitate, there are a few ways in which you can ensure your course is as accessible as possible for those elements that you can control.

Ensure your LMS is well-organized

One of the key points of contact between you and your learners, and ultimately their success in your course, is the virtual course space. Many institutions use learning management systems (LMS), but some may use websites as their main hub for content, as well as learner-learner, and learner-instructor interaction.

Regardless of the platform, the course environment should be intuitive and easy for learners to navigate, so that they do not spend valuable cognitive processing time trying to figure out the course structure, or the LMS interface, or locating where things are in the course. Instead, they can focus on their learning. The impact of a disorganized learning space can have serious consequences on learner engagement and motivation as it is the major point of contact learners have with the course.

Consider the questions:

- Is the syllabus easy to find?
- Is a consolidated course schedule or timeline readily available and clearly visible? Is it logically presented?

- Are the assignment descriptions, rubrics, and exemplars (if applicable) easy to find?
- Is it clear where assignments are to be submitted or posted?
- Is the course content organized in such a way that the expectations for each week are clear?

Even if you have no ability to change the content of the course you will teach, you may still be able to organize your virtual learning space to present it in the most effective way. This may be achieved by using LMS templates.

To get started, we recommend:

1. Use an LMS template to help organize your course;
    - these kinds of templates are great organizational prompts and can help you to determine if you need to add supporting documents (e.g., a weekly schedule).
2. Ask a colleague or teaching assistant to review/navigate the LMS with fresh eyes and point out any areas of confusion or gaps in your current LMS structure.
3. If you have time, determine whether there are simple elements that you can add to provide a more humanized, inclusive, and welcoming experience.
   For example,
    - adding an "About the instructor" page with your picture and biography (see: Sharing your personality and passion);
    - posting a written or recorded land acknowledgement, and
    - pointing to relevant institutional resources (see: Promote course and institutional supports in your course LMS).

A well-organized learning space **sets clear expectations, enhances findability, and provides comprehension support for learners**, ultimately making it a more **accessible and equitable** learning experience.

Note

For different perspectives on why it is important to dedicate time to organizing your virtual learning space, consider a learner who:

- **is the first in their family to attend a post-secondary institution**: research shows that first-generation learners have a steeper learning curve in terms of acclimatizing in this new environment, in addition to navigating their course(s), which may be organized in different ways. A clear course structure can help alleviate one potential source of stress;
- **uses assistive technology, such as a screen reader, to support their learning**: they will appreciate a well-organized learning space so they can quickly find and identify where important information is located;
- **has an accessibility accommodation (e.g., health or mental health challenges)**: from day one of the course they can understand the course and assessment expectations and work to organize their workload and schedule to enable them to appropriately manage their personal situation. With this plan in place, and no unexpected events occurring during the semester, they may not end up reaching out to you to implement elements of their accommodation (e.g., requesting an extension for an assignment submission);
- **is taking a course that is not in their first language**: a clear course page and module outline will help reduce additional, often unnecessary, barriers to understanding and help them prioritize their learning approach.

Going deeper

Where available, LMS templates often include the following adaptable pages:

- module overview/weekly introduction pages;
- basic HTML content pages with pre-styled headings and subheadings;
- course outline/syllabus page;
- course schedule page;
- various activity or assignment pages with instructions;
- course and University policies page, and
- required readings page (if applicable or not otherwise included on a content page).

Below, we've curated a partial list of LMS templates available on common LMS vendor sites, and at some Ontario PSE institutions. Check to see whether your institution has LMS templates available to help you structure your course!

- **Brightspace**: Brightspace HTML Template (version 3.0)
- **Canvas**: Humboldt State University: Designing your course with modules and pages
- **Moodle**: Moodle course templates
- **Queen's University, Brightspace**: Create a course
- **Trent University, Blackboard**: Blackboard Faculty Template
- **University of Toronto, Canvas**: Example remote/online course template – University of Toronto
- **University of Waterloo, Brightspace**: Online course templates

Ensure the accessibility of materials produced for the facilitation of the course

In some virtual courses, the design of the course might require you to:

- produce **short recorded narrated presentations** that summarize key concepts or that connect content to current affairs;
- prepare material to share with learners during **synchronous virtual sessions**, or
- provide **additional content support** to your learners in response to check-point/formative activities, learner feedback, or assignment quality.

To address this, you might want to create an announcement, video (2-7 minutes maximum), summary image, or presentation deck tailored to your current cohort of learners. By keeping the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in mind as you produce these materials in term, you can signal to learners your commitment to ensuring that all learners have equitable access to content and an effective learning experience.

Refer to Module 2.4 Universal design for learning and equitable access to online content for the basics of UDL which involve the key principles of **multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression,** and **multiple means of engagement**. Here we will focus on a few key points to assist should you need to create new documents or multimedia during term.

General considerations:

- **Use accessible font and colour choices.** Regardless of the medium, avoid relying only on bolded text, coloured text, or font changes to indicate important information or emphasis. Screen readers and other assistive technologies do not interpret bolded or coloured text as hierarchical, or of greater or lesser importance.
- When you do use colour, make sure the **text and background colours have strong contrast** and are presented in a **legible font and font size**.
- **Avoid using busy images or bright patterns as background for your text** as it is distracting to learners' ability to read text and may result in areas of the text with insufficient contrast for readability. If not using a solid-coloured background, consider backgrounds with images or strong colours and patterns only around areas where the text will not be present or use a gradient of appropriate colours or muted images/patterns that have been "blurred out" or out of focus, so the learner can access the text.

For documents (e.g., Word or PDF):

- **Use pre-set heading styles in your Word or PDF document.** Headings define the hierarchy of content, and screen readers and other assistive technologies rely on properly formatted headings to navigate a webpage or document. This will also help all learners to quickly scan your documents. Ideally, there should be one h1 (header level 1) per page or document, used for the title of the document/page. For sub-sections, use h2, h3, h4 and so on, to nest content.

For images:

- Ideally, provide **alternative (alt text) or descriptive text** for any images you create/provide to learners in term. Essentially, this means creating a text-based description of an image that describes what sighted people see on screen in a way that allows vision-impaired learners to access the same information that is being presented to sighted learners. Alternative text is often extremely brief while descriptive text is a teaching tool, and is used to ensure that visually seeing an image, chart, graph, or other graphical presentation is not the only way for your learners to access and comprehend the content. Descriptive text may not be necessary for simple or decorative images where alt text may provide enough information for vision-impaired learners, but it is often essential for visual presentations of teaching materials.

For audio recordings:

- You may choose to record audio during term for an announcement or to provide feedback to individual learners when evaluating their assignments. When distributing an audio file to the whole class, it is recommended that you generate **captions** or a **transcript** (at least one) to accompany the file, so it remains accessible to all learners. You may consider doing the same when providing feedback to learners on a case-by-case basis, depending on their needs.

For videos:

- You may choose to **record short videos** during term to clarify concepts or as weekly announcements, for example. It is good practice to provide captions and transcripts for these types of course artifacts;
    - Some recording applications can generate captions automatically through AI (though proofreading is necessary) and some institutions offer enterprise-level media players with this functionality or captioning support. Otherwise, you may seek to pay a company for captioning and transcription services; education rates are often available.
- You may have **live sessions** during your course;
    - Some video conferencing platforms have **live captioning** options. While not always completely accurate, turning on live captioning increases the accessibility of the experience. Should you record the session, this can also form the basis of captions/transcripts for the session that can be edited and provided to learners on request.
    - **Recording live sessions** are also an excellent way to increase the accessibility of the material discussed during those sessions, as learners can return to the recording to confirm their understanding of concepts or those who had difficulty connecting do not miss key information from session. Again, after the session, captions can be edited and the recording can be posted to the course LMS.

Note

Recording live sessions may not be an appropriate option if sensitive or personal topics are being discussed to help protect learners who are being vulnerable in a safe space.

Going deeper

The National Centre on Accessible Educational Materials provides some helpful videos on Creating Accessible Documents on the topics of styles, links, images, design, and evaluation.
Creating Accessible Documents (5 videos ~ 20 mins total)

Beginner guidance for web accessibility can be found in this Web Accessibility for Designers infographic provided by WebAIM.

Note that **generating alternative text or descriptive text for images is a gained skill** and takes time to develop. Often, a good approach is to try to put oneself into the shoes of a learner who has never experienced the content before and also may not see the image itself. Consider what elements are most important and key to understanding the concept being presented and describe them first in a concise way so learners can quickly grasp the key ideas and then work through the details.

Suggested resources for learning alternative text and how to make math accessible can be found through the DIAGRAM Center, including:

- Image Description resources for helping make images accessible; and
- Accessible Math tools, tips, and training.

Reflect and apply: Course accessibility checklist and plan

Consider the course that you intend to facilitate. Is the course virtual space intuitive for learners? Are course

materials clearly organized? Do you plan on creating new learning materials during term and how accessible will they be?

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Use the following response tool to help you review your course from an accessibility perspective and help you plan how you might approach creating course supports for your learners during term. You may also offer this tool to a colleague or teaching assistant who might be able to give you feedback on the organization of your virtual space (page 1 only). Note that this tool is not comprehensive in potential accessibility and organizational considerations but serves as a general guide for best practices.

Your responses will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

When you complete the below activity and wish to download your responses or if you prefer to work in a Word document offline, please follow the steps below

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4.3 Inclusive facilitation practices

Key principles: Facilitation practices that create safe spaces for class engagement

In Module 3.3, Key principles: Facing challenges in learner-learner interactions we discussed conflict and poor netiquette as common social challenges that come up during virtual teaching and facilitation. In order to create a productive course climate that embraces each individual, instructors should strive for a classroom that fosters belonging and value for learners of all identities, backgrounds, and experiences. While we cannot absolutely guarantee safety in inclusive learning as these spaces are not power-neutral, colorblind, or devoid of conflict, by setting up course infrastructure for learner-learner interactions with inclusivity in mind, many conflicts can be preempted.

University of Waterloo

Strategies in action: Building course structures that create safe spaces for class engagement

There are few simple strategies to build positive opportunities for critical but respectful conversations in virtual courses. Thoughtfully organizing learners into smaller groups to help foster a sense of community and reduce the transactional distance between learners, promoting respectful dialogue and critique through careful framing and construction of inquiry questions, and addressing conflict as it arises, provide strong foundations for rigorous but safe learning spaces.

Credit: student by The Icon Z from thenounproject.com.

Grouping learners in a different way

The use of small groups is a common way to create small cooperative learner-learner communities within a course. By setting up different types of groups with varying membership throughout the semester, learners will be exposed to different points of view and lived experiences, enriching their overall experience. Group composition can have a significant impact on group functioning and perspectives that are shared. To enhance the richness of discussions and work done, consider setting up groups in different ways.

For example:

- **randomly distribute** learners into small groups;
- allocate learners into **small groups according to a characteristic** (e.g., their discipline of study if in an interdisciplinary course, their location/time zone);

    - depending on the purpose of the group, it may be beneficial to group similar characteristics together or equally distribute learners across groups;
- allow learners to **self-select themselves into a group** (with auto-allocation of unmatched learners to groups after a certain date);
    - in the context of assignments, groups could also be labelled with topics so that learners would have flexibility in selecting both their topic and the group members they would like to work with;
    - if allowing learners to self-select, consider if 'cliques' of learners are at risk of occurring which may stifle discussion or expression.

Learners can also be allocated into different groups as the course progresses. For example, if you have randomly allocated learners into small groups for weekly asynchronous discussions, determine if it would be beneficial for learners to be reallocated half-way through the semester to gain new perspectives from others they have yet to interact with. This is also a helpful emergency strategy should functioning in one or more groups deteriorate or major conflicts arise.

Facilitating productive and authentic discussions

Keeping discussions productive and authentic is essential to creating space for learner viewpoints. Whether or not you have designed the discussion activities in your course, you can help foster spaces in which online learners get a chance to **interact as humans, feel at ease**, and feel that their **perspectives are important**. Some of the best strategies for doing this include:

Credit: Discussion by mim studio from NounProject.com

- **setting the tone** for class discussions by offering examples of good quality posts, emphasizing the importance of good netiquette and healthy academic discourse, and signalling to learners that their viewpoints are welcome;
- **modelling** good practices in discussions by creating posts of your own that offer appropriate forms of affirmation and critique in order to push conversation forward and give space to varying viewpoints;
- helping learners **get to know one another** by using effective ice-breaker and introduction activities, and encouraging social interaction throughout the term;
- providing learners the opportunity to **share lived-experiences or professional perspectives** in relation to course content, grounding and motivating learners in their learning by increasing its real-world relevance as well as exposing different points of view; and
- fostering **learner-led discussions** through **Socratic prompting**, and by encouraging learners to ask engaging follow-up questions in response to each other's posts.

Above all, keep in mind that all of your learners are human beings, and try to create an atmosphere in which everyone's personhood is front and centre within all discussions. Doing so helps all your learners to participate

fully in your course, which in turn fosters more relevant and valuable discussion experiences for them, and for you!

Going deeper

Socratic questioning is a form of disciplined questioning to help critically pursue thought in a number of directions and for different purposes. Recently, R. W. Paul's six types of Socratic Questions were expanded to nine types:

- questions of clarification;
- questions that probe purpose;
- questions that probe assumptions;
- questions that probe information, reasons, evidence, and causes;
- questions about viewpoints or perspectives;
- questions that probe implications and consequences;
- questions about the question;
- questions that probe concepts, and
- questions that probe inferences and interpretations.

This handout of Questions for a Socratic Dialogue can be a useful resource for framing and extending synchronous and asynchronous discussions.

This staff blog post from the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom offers additional thoughts on how Socratic questioning can help facilitate equality and diversity discussions:

- Equality and diversity: An example of Socratic questioning

Strategies in action: Managing controversy in virtual class discussions

While you may not be in a position to make changes to the content of the course, the teaching and facilitation of a course provides different ways to influence and frame how the content is presented, and counters challenges that may arise in terms of the asynchronous or synchronous class discussions. Common challenges in virtual class discussions include offered by Tondeur and Gatling (2012, as cited in Faculty Focus, 2013), include:

- **The asynchronous format**: If discussions are done via an asynchronous method, it is possible for instructors to overlook inflammatory or out-of-hand discussions. Learners may be interacting with each other over several days and other students may be able to read these discussions before you notice and intervene.
- **Potential misinterpretation of predominantly text-based communication**: Tone, intention, and other visual cues are missing when communication is done primarily in a text-based fashion and can quickly lead to misinterpretation or escalation if not addressed in a timely fashion.
- **Relative anonymity**: Although less likely if you apply the humanizing principles discussed throughout this course, some learners may be emboldened to post damaging, hurtful, or incendiary messages as they don't feel personally connected to their peers. On the flipside, this relative anonymity is also often seen as a benefit for learners who may not feel as comfortable sharing during synchronous sessions.

In addition to setting a climate for facilitating productive and authentic discussions using the strategies in the previous section, there are additional strategies for preparing for or addressing controversy in the virtual classroom (Saunders & Kardia, 1997).

Address known issues with the content

In your work preparing for the term, you may notice certain problematic ideas or omission of certain perspectives in the course content. Take some time at the beginning of each module (e.g., in a weekly announcement, as a note associated with the content/a particular source, or as a verbal note during a synchronous session) to alert learners of this problem. At the same time encouraging students to critically engage themselves with the problematic material serves to promote a rigorous and inquisitive class environment. You may even choose to ask learners to consider their own agreement or disagreement with that which you have highlighted.

Be prepared to address issues

Spend a little time reviewing your course topics and determine if some might be considered controversial. Imagine or consider what kinds of controversial perspectives might be brought up during these class discussions and think about (or write down) how you might respond. This is likely to assist you in not getting caught off guard. Timeliness in response would be more important in a synchronous session where issues should not be ignored but addressed right away; in asynchronous discussions, you have a little more time to put together a thoughtful response.

Be open to students' reactions to course material, even when you feel uncomfortable with the manner in which it is surfaced

Learners may publicly challenge inaccurate information about particular groups that appears in course readings, films, etc. Learners may react strongly upon hearing what they perceive to be inaccurate and negative information about their group. Learners may resent having to "pick up the slack" in classes where instructors and their peers lack knowledge about the group with which the particular individuals are affiliated. When learners are of the opinion that the information being given in the course is biased against their group, they may feel that they are also missing valuable learning opportunities. In this situation, it is most important to be open to the perspectives these students share. Giving serious consideration to learners' views that are in the "minority" will encourage learners to respond honestly about issues while also encouraging learners to think more broadly about issues. This does not, however, mean that you have to agree with the learners' views or feel that the learners' views are above critique.

Be honest with your level of comfort with an issue

There are likely to be situations, ideas, or concepts with which you are less familiar and less confident in immediately knowing how to respond to reasonable questions made by learners. Regardless, it is important to respond to comments in ways that learners will not interpret as dismissive. Be honest about your lack of knowledge, acknowledge the learner's point, and make efforts to secure information about the learner's point to share with the class at a time in the near future. It is also important to emphasize that everyone can be a teacher and that instructors and learners can learn from one another.

Recognize learners' fears and concerns about conflict

Learners enter a course with different levels of experience and comfort with conflict. It is important to normalize the experience of conflict in the virtual classroom, particularly in courses that focus on controversial topics. This can be accomplished through explicit discussion of learner experiences with conflict and the use of structured discussion exercises.

Respond promptly to conflict in a manner that helps learners become aware of the "learning moment" this conflict provides

Whether it is an inappropriate statement or escalating interpersonal conflict during a live session, a concern about another learners' behaviour raised to you in private chat during synchronous sessions, or an email alerting you of questionable interactions occurring in a discussion board, it is important to address these issues promptly and directly. Challenging discussions need to be facilitated in a manner that does not result in

hostility among learners and create a toxic climate. You can avoid these outcomes by encouraging students to tie their feelings and conflicts to the course material and by looking for underlying meanings and principles that might get buried in the process of class conflict. Learners appreciate tensions between groups in the class being recognized and effectively addressed.

Maintain the role of facilitator

One of the challenges of teaching is maintaining the role of instructor under a variety of conditions. For example, you can get caught up in expressing your own perspective in heated discussions or can become overly silent in discussions that go beyond your own knowledge base or experience. While these responses are understandable, such role abdication can create chaos in the virtual classroom or force students to fill in the abdicated facilitator role. In order to avoid this outcome, you should examine your typical responses to conflict. It can also be useful to find ways that you may admit your limits with respect to content areas while maintaining responsibility for the group process.

Credit: Adapted from Shari Saunders and Diana Kardia, Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan

Strategies in action: Considering facilitation practices that respond to the needs of your Indigenous learners

The context of this module is that, as an instructor, you may not have the ability to adjust the content or the design of your virtual course – your sphere of influence might be limited to facilitating the course in term. Given this context, we offer some suggestions for how aspects of your course might be decolonized or Indigenized and how you might specifically support Indigenous learners in your course. For your deeper (un)learning and appreciation, click to listen to a podcast featuring Mitch Huguenin, a Métis Educational Developer specializing in the area of Indigenous Pedagogy at Trent University. He discusses ideas, principles, and strategies related to:

1. Decolonizing or Indigenizing approaches to facilitating a virtual course; and
2. How one might facilitate and promote a learning environment that is culturally safe for, and inclusive of, Indigenous learners.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=3312#oembed-1

Transcript (PDF)

Credit: Mitch Huguenin, Trent University

References and credits

Faculty Focus. (2013, March 19). *Managing Controversy in the Online Classroom*. https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-course-design-and-preparation/managing-controversy-in-the-online-classroom/

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4.4 Trauma-informed approaches

Key principles: Trauma-sensitive communication and collaboration

Some of your learners have experienced trauma. The prevalence of college and university learners who have experienced trauma is estimated to range from 60-85% (Read, Ouimette, White, Colder, & Farrow, 2011; Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008). While PSE instructors are not expected to be counselors for their learners, taking steps to foster safer learning spaces through sensitive communication and collaboration strategies can help those learners feel comfortable, and help to reduce the chance of triggering or re-traumatizing those learners.

Traumatic experiences occur when an individual's internal ability to cope with a difficult event or circumstance is not sufficient or unable to deal with the external source of stress (Hoch, Stewart, Webb, & Wyandt-Hiebert, 2015). Trauma can be the result of a single traumatic incident, long-term or ongoing situation, and/or can be passed down from generation to generation (Brave Heart, 2003; Denham, 2008). Whether a particular event is traumatic for an individual is not determined only by an event or situation, but rather results from a combination of personal, cultural, and societal factors (Elliott & Urquiza, 2006).

Some learner populations are at a higher risk for experiencing trauma (Davidson, 2017), such as:

- learners who have been raised in foster care,
- Indigenous learners,
- 2SLGBTQ+ learners,
- refugee learners,
- non-traditional adult learners.

Trauma-informed teaching has a lot to do with creating safe learning spaces, both for your learners and for yourself as an instructor. People feel safe when our needs are met and we feel protected from harm (Huguenin, 2020). It is relatively common to have general "netiquette" rules associated with a virtual course; sometimes these guidelines for appropriate online behaviour are even provided by a program or faculty. Creating clear guidelines for students can be a helpful first step towards creating a safe learning environment. There are several other ways in which instructors can build on this, by becoming more trauma-informed and adopting some more trauma-informed course facilitation strategies. Trauma-informed strategies are beneficial to learners in all courses, not just those courses that engage in well-known sensitive or controversial topics.

Principles of trauma-informed teaching

Readings

Please read the following excellent (and short) resource, Trauma-informed teaching in remote courses (PDF), authored by Mitch Huguenin, at Trent University, which provides an excellent and quick overview of some key principles of trauma-informed teaching.

This resource provides some general guidance on how instructors can take steps to incorporate the following principles into their online course facilitation:

- **Predictability**
- **Connection**

- **Flexibility**
- **Safety**
- **Self-awareness**

Strategies in action: Cultivating a safe space

Creating a learning space where learners feel safe showing up to learn, supports authentic and significant learning not only for learners who may have experienced trauma, but for all your learners. As discussed in 1.4 Learner-instructor connection: Designing courses with personality, when engaging in authentic and transformational learning, learners make themselves vulnerable (to making mistakes, failures, and difficult emotions such as frustration, confusion, self-doubt, and even shame). Showing up to learn, engage, participate, and put in effort takes courage. You can help your learners be courageous in their learning by creating spaces where they feel safe.

Some strategies that can help to foster safe learning spaces include:

- **Inviting learners to be co-creators in designing the 'ground-rules'** for communication, collaboration, and how the class should handle difficult topics or tense situations throughout the term. This co-creation can help learners feel involved, accountable, and invested in the learning community and also helps to set expectations and awareness.
- **Allow learners to brainstorm topics that may be triggering**. This is not an activity of self-disclosure, but rather an invitation for the class as a whole to think through topics and actions that can be hurtful or re-traumatizing if there is someone in the course who has experienced trauma or forms of implicit or explicit discrimination, such as prejudice, sexism, or racism.
- **Modelling authenticity and vulnerability**. When instructors model for learners what caring, thoughtful, sensitive communication looks like, it will be easier for them to see and understand how to do so themselves. As the instructor, you play a critical role in setting the tone for your course and the degree to which your learners will feel safe and comfortable. One strategy that can help put learners at ease is when you share authentically, which helps learners to see you as a person and that you see them as people. You do not need to disclose deeply personal things about yourself, but letting them into your world a little helps to break down barriers between you and your learners. The more authentic, open, honest, and caring you are, the more at ease and safe learners tend to feel and the more likely they are to mirror you and feel comfortable doing so.

Strategies in action: Building safe spaces with collaborative charters

A collaborative class charter is a class-wide set of ground rules and expectations that learners and instructors create together, which is best situated early in the term (first couple of weeks). This can be used as part of an introductory activity discussed **synchronously** or **asynchronously**. If you do decide to have a synchronous discussion about this, it can be helpful to allow for asynchronous contribution, for those learners who may not be able to attend, who may need time to think and process, or who don't feel comfortable speaking up (or typing in the chat) during a synchronous video session. Course-level and group-level charters can be a

particularly helpful addition to a course that includes class discussions and group work in the design. Guidance on creating **Collaborative Class Charters** is provided below.

1. Some **suggested topics to discuss and include** in your Collaborative Class Charter include:

    - What is a barrier to your online learning?
    - What is a solution or what can we do as a class (instructor and learners) to remove barriers to online learning?
    - What can you do to stay engaged and connected throughout the term?
    - What would make this course feel un-safe? (You may want to explore specific topics, modules, assessments, group work).
    - How are we going to deal with conflict?
    - How should we deal with disclosures?

2. Then **summarize the class discussion and outline the terms and ground rules** the class landed on in a charter/agreement document that outlines how the learning community will work together throughout the term and ask learners to all sign and agree to the charter.
3. **Keep this as a living document, refer to it and return** to it throughout the term.

    - Consider doing an anonymous evaluation (survey) part-way through the term to obtain learners' input on how they feel the class is doing in terms of following the charter. Does anything need to be changed or updated?

4. **Ask the class to do a self/class/group evaluation at the end of the year**, on how well the class/group followed and implemented the collaborative charter. If you have some control over the grade breakdown in the course, you might want to include a participation mark for this evaluation, which can motivate more participation but can also serve as an additional motivator or mechanism of accountability that might keep them referring back to the charter and reflecting on their own behaviour throughout the term.

    - To see an example of a group-charter and self-peer evaluations see the **Group social intervention assignment** in section 1.6. Learner-learner connection: Designing authentic peer teaching and learning opportunities.

5. If/when **conflict or a difficult interaction arises** between learners or between yourself and a learner **go back to the charter**, which can help to de-escalate the situation and de-personalize it. If a difficult situation does arise, say in a course discussion or during group work, that is upsetting for a learner, it is important that you step in as this helps to build trust. Instructors should protect learners from personal attacks and emotional harm in their courses.

Credit: Example derived from a conversation with Colleen McMillan, School of Social Work, University of Waterloo.

Going deeper

To learn more about trauma and trauma-informed practices in post-secondary education see the following resource by Shannon Davidson (2017):

- Trauma-informed practices for post-secondary education: A guide

Key principles: Facilitating sensitive topics

Content warnings are

verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.
(University of Michigan, n.d.)

A **trigger warning** is a

a specific type of content warning that forewarns learners of content that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders.
(University of Michigan, n.d.)

As briefly noted in Module 2, a content warning might help some, but it might trigger others (or make them think they should be triggered), and there are lots of times when a seemingly straightforward topic can bring up unanticipated yet painful associations for someone. The idea of a content warning is **not to censure or omit challenging material** from a course but to **forewarn learners of potentially sensitive topics**, giving them **autonomy over their learning**, and signalling that the instructor **respects their wellbeing**.

While there is an active conversation critiquing the content or trigger warning for "coddling" students or restricting academic freedom, generally Canadian students appear to hold a moderate position on the issue. A 2015 StudentVue survey from Academica Group of 1,500 Canadian students found that

over two-thirds of respondents agreed that trigger warnings should be issued in the classroom – within reason... [such as] **limiting trigger warnings to any material that is commonly recognized as disturbing or related to traumatic events** – war, abuse, graphic images and videos, etc." [Furthermore, respondents encouraged] professors to be **judicious with warnings**... and to present these warning with a casual **'just so you know' tone** instead of a formal one when announcing them in class."
(Academica Group, 2015; emphasis added)

Finally, 85% of students surveyed "agreed that discussing difficult material in class provided important learning opportunities, and many **did not want their curriculum to be curtailed** for the sake of those who would rather step out" (Academica, 2015).

What learners have to say:

"I have experienced a traumatic event and would appreciate if I were not blindsided by encountering relevant material again. However, especially in a postsecondary context where academic freedom, challenging your thinking, and encountering uncomfortable ideas are critically important, they should not be used to avoid assignments/classes/ideas, etc."
(StudentVue Panelist)

Strategies in action: Providing content warnings

Depending on the context, a few different types of content warnings are possible:

Blanket warnings

Blanket warnings are used when the nature of the course will necessitate an ongoing discussion of emotionally challenging and difficult topics; this would often appear in the course syllabus or in a welcome announcement/ content page of the course.

Example 1:

"The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with racism every week. Much of it will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content that discusses or represents racism and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage bravely, empathetically, and thoughtfully with difficult content every week."

Credit: LSA Inclusive Teaching | University of Michigan (PDF)

Example 2:

"Our classroom provides an open space for the critical and civil exchange of ideas. Some readings and other content in this course will include topics that some students may find offensive and/or traumatizing. I'll aim to forewarn students about potentially disturbing content and I ask all students to help to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity."

Credit: University of Waterloo

In-syllabus/course content warnings

When warnings are needed for specific course material, the simplest way to include a warning is right beside the resource in question in the syllabus or where it is listed in the LMS. Tagging themes and topics is one option, or contextualizing the resource is another.

Example 3:

- **August 16** – Read: Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, Chapters 1-4
  Tags: Race, Racism, Racist Slurs, Violence
- **August 18** – Read: Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, Chapters 5-9
  Tags: Race, Racism, Racist Slurs, Racial Violence (graphic scene pgs. 82-96, will be discussed at length in the discussion section)

Credit: LSA Inclusive Teaching | University of Michigan (PDF)

Example 4:

"The following reading includes a discussion of the harsh treatment experienced by First Nations children in residential schools in the 1950s. This content is disturbing, so I encourage everyone to prepare themselves emotionally before proceeding. If you believe that the reading will be traumatizing for you, then you may choose to forgo it. You will still, however, be responsible for material that you miss, so please arrange to get notes from another student or see me individually."

Credit: University of Waterloo

Going deeper

For more findings from the StudentVue survey of Canadian students, refer to

- Respect, not censorship: Students weigh in on the trigger warning debate

Two helpful resources for learning more about content warnings are presented:

- University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence: Trigger Warnings
- University of Michigan: An introduction to content warnings and trigger warnings (PDF)

Strategies in action: Additional strategies for facilitating sensitive topics

In addition to preparing students with content warnings, and cultivating a safe space, you can continue to **build trust among learners by easing into more difficult conversations** if possible, and by **scaffolding the skills required**.

For example, in a global health course, you may spend the first few weeks getting learners more comfortable with concepts such as equality, equity, and intersectionality, and with practice in self-reflection, examining one's positionality, as well as engaging in reflexive practice individually and in small group settings. Then in later weeks, more complex topics such as systemic racism or settler colonialism and impacts on public health can be explored in a more meaningful and safe way.

We conducted similar scaffolding of knowledge and skills (through Reflect and Apply activities) in the context of course design throughout Module 2 where we carefully organized and scaffolded content from more broad and familiar equity and inclusivity concepts to some that might be more challenging or unfamiliar to those newer to the course design space. Review the menu headers for Module 2 to see this scaffolding in action.

Consistently **engaging learners' own experiences into the discussion** allows greater exposure to different points of view and facilitates skills in adopting different perspectives. Asking learners to adopt differing perspectives and then comparing back to their own experiences and integrating them through assimilation or adaptation, can help generate rich and valuable discussions of difficult topics.

The University of Waterloo offers additional strategies in dealing with sensitive or challenging material, some that we've highlighted are:

- **Allow students to interact with disturbing material outside of class.** A student might feel more vulnerable watching a documentary about sexual assault while in a synchronous space compared to asynchronous study time.
- **Provide captions when using video materials**: some content is easier to watch while reading captions than while listening to the audio.
- When necessary, **provide written descriptions of graphic images** as a substitute for the actual visual content.
- **Advise students to be sensitive to their classmates' vulnerabilities** when they are preparing class presentations.

- **Help your students understand the difference between emotional trauma and intellectual discomfort**: the former is harmful, as is triggering it in the wrong context (such as in a class space rather than in therapy); the latter is fundamental to post-secondary education – it means our ideas are being challenged as we struggle to resolve cognitive dissonance.

Credit: University of Waterloo

Going deeper

This resource, Guidelines for talking about difficult topics in a remote course, from Trent University provides an excellent summary of how we can teach controversial and sensitive topics in our virtual spaces. This resource consolidates many of the themes discussed in this module. We recommend this resource for further learning.

To summarize the approach:

1. Prepare for discussions
    - Develop content/trigger warnings
    - Know yourself
    - Recognize the diversity of your students
    - Establish discussion guidelines in advance
    - Assign a pre-discussion task
    - Begin with a "warm-up" discussion
2. During discussions
    - Set an objective for the discussion
    - Establish a safe environment
    - Be an active facilitator
    - Address the difficulty
    - Foster civility
3. Follow-up
    - Summarize discussion and gather student feedback
    - Reflect

Even with your best efforts, it is still possible that a learner may not be able to effectively engage in a particular piece of sensitive, challenging, or provocative content in your course for a number of valid reasons. If a learner reaches out, try to provide a way for them to contribute to the academic discourse on the same topic but using a different source if the one you provided proves too overwhelming for them. **Your flexibility in this respect would also depend on how central this particular resource is to your learning outcomes.**

The next section elaborates further on learner disclosures.

Key principles: Understanding and responding to learner disclosures

It is very common for learners to reach out directly to you, their instructor, once they sense, predict, or experience a significant barrier to their continued success in your course. This could be related to their health status, events in their personal life, or even their relationship to the course material (if it covers sensitive or controversial topics, for example). There is a dual need for empathy and authentic engagement with learners to understand their needs as well as balancing your responsibilities as an instructor in your institution and fairness to other learners in the course when devising a solution for the issue at hand.

It is important to understand the **policies around academic accommodations** at your institution and department. Often learners with chronic or ongoing mental health challenges or health problems, or disability needs need to go through a formal process and receive an accommodation letter that they, or the associated office, forwards to the instructor. **Becoming familiar with these policies and how you are expected to respond are important to know**. The level of disclosure (e.g., details) a learner is required to give may be much lower with a letter than without. There may also be processes where learners can self-declare an accommodation need and receive a short extension on assignments, for example.

Strategies in action: Responding to learner disclosures

It is impossible to cover all the ways one might respond to disclosures, however, **take the time to listen to your learner**. Often through simple conversation, empathy, and a little compromise, reasonable plans can be put into place to accommodate the learner and support them to get back on track in their studies. A brief list of potential solutions include:

- providing a simple extension for an assignment;
- providing alternative means for participation;
    - learners could review a synchronous session recording and write a reflection rather than attend the session for a topic that might be challenging for them to face due to personal history;
    - learners could submit an assignment in a different modality (e.g., audio or video podcast) instead of a traditional essay, or
    - learners use different source material but complete the work in the same modality as the rest of the class;
- in extenuating circumstances, you may consider omitting their grade for that assignment and reweighing the remainder of the assignments (note: consider if any core learning outcomes will be compromised as a result).

Strategies in action: Sexual violence disclosures

Often there is a **mandatory requirement to report a sexual violence disclosure** to a sexual health or equity office at the institution; in some cases, reporting is required by law. You are expected to respond to such disclosures in a non-judgmental and supportive way. Often times you will not be able to keep this information confidential but you should use discretion in your reporting through the sexual violence reporting mechanism at your institution. It is **strongly recommended that you complete sexual violence bystander intervention training** (or similar training) offered at your institution so you can appropriately support your learners.

Going deeper

Responding to disclosures on campus is a website designed to support all employees of colleges and universities in Ontario. Along with myth-busting educational material and resources, the website provides a 7-module training course. The outcomes of the training are to be able to:

- respond supportively and effectively to disclosures of sexual violence;
- know where to seek tangible support and resources in your institution and communities;
- examine one's own attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs, and
- learn about professional and institutional initiatives in education around the province.

Strategies in action: Disclosures from Indigenous learners

It is relatively common for Indigenous learners, especially first-generation post-secondary Indigenous learners, to feel lost or overwhelmed on a settler-dominated campus or virtual LMS environment, especially if they are far away from home. Course topics or current events related to Indigenous issues can also cause distress as learners may be away from their communities and may feel unable to contribute to solutions or participate in community activities or ceremonies; if they are learning from home, they may feel isolated from the perceived indifference of their peers. It is important to show compassion for their situation and also connect them with culturally appropriate campus supports (e.g., Indigenous student centre or Indigenous student associations) so they can engage with resources that will provide them with the most appropriate support and a community to convene with.

In 2018, Indspire, Canada's only Indigenous-led national charity dedicated to advancing the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples, produced the report, Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience (PDF).

In this report

students shared the weight of being one of few Indigenous students in a post-secondary classroom. They addressed the **emotional pressure** of instructors and professors' expectations for them to be **experts and speak on behalf of all Indigenous peoples**; others spoke about a welcoming and supportive educational experience. Students expressed the **importance of culture, identity and belonging in classrooms**, on campus and within Indigenous student services. Many spoke about the impact of not having these things and the experience of feeling **marginalized, isolated and at times, the sting of racism and discrimination in classes and on campus**. In many cases, they expressed how the lack of Indigenous curriculum and knowledge of instructional staff contributed to many of the concerns they raised.

(Roberta Jamieson, President and CEO of Indspire
in Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience, p. 4)

Going deeper

To learn more about the experiences of Indigenous learners in PSE in Canada, we encourage you read the Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience (PDF) report, as well as a more recent 2021 Indspire Research Knowledge Nest report:

- Holding our ground: Indigenous student post-secondary persistence & early leaving (PDF)

University of Waterloo

Strategies in action: Respectful discussion of populations experiencing marginalization

Whether your course explicitly takes up concepts of social marginalization or not, it is sometimes necessary to discuss groups that experience marginalization while teaching. And, whether or not a particular group is represented amongst the learners in your class, it is important to be able to reference any group that experiences marginalization in a way that conveys respect and the inherent dignity of persons.

Some "do" and "don't" strategies and points of understanding for discussing groups that experience marginalization:

Do

Communicate about marginalization in ways that emphasize that it is a social process that members of particular groups experience

We have been intentional in this section in referring to "groups that experience marginalization" rather than "marginalized groups" this is a subtle and in some ways semantic distinction, but we make it because of the importance of recognizing that marginalization is not a positioning that is inherent to any individual or group based on traits, but rather a social process that is enacted upon people and groups by the broader society which produces real or potential disadvantage (Von jacobi, Edmiston, & Ziegler, 2017). Focusing language on marginalization (a process) rather than marginalized people or groups (a state of being) can help emphasize that marginalization is socially produced circumstance and not inevitable.

Don't

Call out members of groups experiencing marginalization to describe their experience or speak for the group they identify with

People experiencing marginalization are often called on, particularly in groups dominated by people with privileged identities, to describe or explain their experience of oppression, or otherwise to speak on behalf of the marginalized group that they have identified as being part of. This is especially problematic in instances where a learner is or appears to be a member of a visible minority and is called on by an instructor or another member of the group without having already named themselves as a member of a marginalized group (e.g., racialized learners, learners who wear visible religious symbols).

The kind of "calling out" referenced here might take the form of questions like "Tell us about what it is like to be disabled?" or "Could you offer us an Indigenous perspective, Sarah?" These examples are especially problematic because they assume that there is a universal experience of disability and Indigeneity, respectively. While some readers who live with privilege may feel shock at the obvious level of insensitivity conveyed by these examples, we include them here because they are paragons of the kind of experiences that people experiencing marginalization can face in PSE learning environments.

Do

Use person-centred language in reference to all identities of marginalization

Refer to individuals and groups who experience marginalization in ways that emphasize the person first, and not their group identity. So, for instance, "people with disabilities" is more person-centred than "disabled people."

Likewise, unless you personally identify membership with a particular group, take care in using "in-group" references or reclaimed terminology to reference groups experiencing marginalization. For instance, the term "queer" or "queer community" may be used by members of that community to refer to themselves, but unless you have community-acknowledged status as an ally, it is probably best to maintain a more respectful address like "2SLGBTQ+" or "sexual and gender minority."

Do

Invite/encourage members of groups experiencing marginalization to share their experiences when there are windows of opportunity to do so

As you become more comfortable facilitating discussions that involve identities of marginalization, you may begin to notice opportunities where people share aspects of that experience; in such instances, it may be appropriate to invite them to expand or deepen what they have shared. Inquiries such as "Would you like to say more about that?" can be helpful, and might be extended with "I understand if you would prefer not to."

Invitational approaches can signal to learners that the instructor is interested in exploring experiences of marginalization without calling out a marginalized person to speak of their experience or for a group.

Going deeper

Shaista Aziz Patel explores and reflects on the challenges she encounters when, as a racialized scholar, she teaches students about Indigenous resistance and how she must carefully reflect if she is invertedly causing harm and perpetuating colonial harms. Her article provides many points of reflection for any instructor and their own facilitating strategies in their own discipline.

- Talking complicity, breathing coloniality: Interrogating settler-centric pedagogy of teaching about white settler colonialism

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4.5 Addressing microaggressions in virtual learning contexts

Key principles: Social identity as a starting point for understanding microaggressions

In Module 2.3. Social justice in virtual learning contexts, we introduced and developed the notion of social identity, which we defined around an individual's personal identification with a broader social group or community. In the same module, we also asked you to complete the power flower exercise that provided an opportunity to reflect on your own social identity, especially with regard to identities that either align or misalign with a dominant social group in that particular identity area (e.g., race, social class, status within colonialism, etc.).

Understanding social identity is an important precursor to understanding microaggressions, because it is social identity—particularly social identity experiencing marginalization—that is the primary point of injury when someone experiences a microaggression. In the next section, we'll ask you to extend the reflection that you completed on the power flower in Module 2.3. Social justice in virtual learning contexts.

Reflect and apply: Extending your own power flower

If you haven't already, please complete the power flower exercise in Module 2.3. Social justice in virtual learning contexts. If you aren't able to commit the time to complete the full activity, we suggest that you review the aspects of social identity that are displayed in the power flower in order to get the most out of this extension exercise.

Thinking about your completion of the power flower diagram, and your reflection on the activity, extend your learning by responding to the question in the interaction below.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page, refresh the page, or hit the back button). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

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Note: Social justice, as a part of humanizing learning, requires a lot of reflection on identity that can be intimate and personal. You may also leave these fields blank and record your responses elsewhere on your own device, or in your own offline journal or notebook.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/humanizinglearningonline/?p=3316#h5p-46

Key principles: Microaggressions in virtual learning contexts

A University of British Columbia resource, Microaggressions in the online classroom, characterizes **microaggressions** and their impact as

small comments or gestures that are experienced as subtle forms of discrimination or attack against marginalized groups. Microaggressions are often unintentional and can be easily explained away, but they leave lasting impacts on students who experience them regularly. They are constant reminders that someone doesn't belong or isn't worthy. Even though they may be seen as small acts, they collectively normalize prejudice and reinforce it. Research is clear that regular exposure to microaggressions can do real psychological damage. (Williams, 2019)

Being able to recognize and respond tactfully to microaggressions in your virtual classroom is an important way you can protect learners, preserve the sense of safety you have cultivated in your course, and perhaps even turn a microaggression into a teachable moment. The resources provided below provide a great introduction to microaggressions in virtual learning spaces.

Readings

Please read the following resources from the University of British Columbia (UBC), which provide an excellent and concise introduction to microaggressions in virtual learning contexts.

- Documentation: Inclusive Teaching/Microaggressions in the classroom
- Microaggression in the classroom (PDF)

Strategies in action: Recognizing and responding to microaggressions

The best way to learn to recognize microaggressions is to see examples of them at play, along with guidance on how to tactfully address them.

Explore examples and strategies that address microaggressions

The following resource from UBC provides many case studies of microaggressions that students have experienced, along with suggestions on how to respond to and address those situations. Microaggressions in the online classroom case studies include scenarios such as:

- Failure to offer a land acknowledgement
- Dismissal of racial inequalities
- Putting a black student on the spot
- COVID-19 conspiracy theories

- Misgendering a student
- Repeated incorrect pronoun use
- Uneven student participation in class discussion
- Choosing group project partners
- Use of closed captions
- Questions about protesters in social movement
- Economic value of diversity in workplace

Reflect and apply: Responding to microaggressions in your own virtual learning environments

Perhaps you have witnessed a microaggression unfold in one of your own virtual learning environments. If so, how did you respond? Did your response resolve the situation in a way that left you and the learners feeling that course environment was safe for everyone (learners and instructors, and those who were the perpetrators and receivers of the microaggression)? If you were unsatisfied with the resolution, how might you respond differently the next time a similar situation arises in your virtual teaching?

In this interactive we would like you to document a short reflection on how you responded to a microaggression in your teaching. If you have not responded to such a situation in your teaching, choose one of the case studies in the UBC Microaggressions in the online classroom resource and extend or nuance one of the resolutions suggested there based on your own context and experience.

How to complete this activity and save your work:

Type your response to the questions in the box below. Your answers will be saved as you move forward to the next question (note: your answers will not be saved if you navigate away from this page, refresh the page, or hit the back button). Your responses are private and cannot be seen by anyone else.

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