

Start Here! An Orientation to DOTS

Estimated time to completion: ~2-3 hours

Welcome! This page kicks off the DePaul Online Teaching Series (DOTS), prepares you for effective participation in the course, and serves as a preface to *Module 1*.

In the context of the present course, the Orientation page also includes brief justifications for our course design, delivery, and technology choices, as these belong to the DOTS subject matter.

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Step 1: Website Structure Overview

A. Navigation menu

The course navigation menu includes four sections:

1. General Information
2. Course Sequence
3. Communication/Collaboration
4. Resources / Support

The "Course Sequence" section constitutes the core of the course. It includes six progressive modules, prefaced by the "Orientation" menu area that kicks off DOTS.

B. Modules

Each module within the "Course Sequence" section includes three parts:

i) Overview & Objectives, ii) Assignments & Resources, and iii) Wrap-up Meeting.

It is organized around deadline-driven learning activities that support accomplishing the module's learning objectives and are supported by resources that include lecture notes, select additional readings, audio/video materials, course or course-portion examples, discussion forums, or a combination of these.

Note: *Depending on your browser, links that are programmed to open in a new window may instead open in a new tab. If this is the case, you will have to select the new tab to view the content.*

Rather than highlighting each module's resources, this section of the navigation menu highlights the course aspects that students overwhelmingly focus on:

i) what they need to do, ii) in what order, iii) by when, and iv) at what reward / cost.

In such design

- resources are introduced to the assigned activities as supporting materials,
- learning objectives are communicated explicitly at the beginning of each module and implicitly through appropriately designed learning activities, and
- regular, frequent, and deadline-driven assessment milestones pace student progress.

We will be addressing these issues throughout DOTS.

C. Resource Archive

A collection of all course-related materials is compiled under the "Resource Archive" menu item. This is included in the last navigation menu section, along with technical, instructor, and other supporting information.

Complementing the sequential portion of the course with a supporting section that includes all course resources in a single location provides students with quick and easy access to all resources and a birds-eye view of the course that helps communicate how individual modules relate to one another and to the course as a whole.

Step 2: Syllabus and Schedule

The DOTS syllabus and schedule are accessible through the online course-navigation menu.

Read the syllabus to become familiar with the course's learning goals, expectations, and guidelines, prior to starting your module-level work.

Browse through the schedule for an overview of the course's online and face-to-face activities and milestones. Scheduling details may change as the course progresses; any changes will be actively communicated to you and entered in the posted schedule.

Step 3: Course Interactions Overview

A. Your role as students

Within DOTS, you take the role of students and we, the facilitators, take the role of instructors. In this spirit, the assumption is that you do not have the credentials and experience you already possess. This gives us the opportunity to design the course in a way that exemplifies proven successful ways of presenting materials, guidelines, and assignments to online students. Therefore, and similarly to the grading process outlined in the syllabus, the language and format of this course site will approach you as students, for the sole purpose of illustrating possible best practices for your review.

B. Team-based learning

Group formation

For several of the assignments, you will be working collaboratively in groups of four-to-five participants. Work groups were formed randomly and could have also been formed on an alphabetical basis by last name. The use of such group formation methods is supported by the known, high uniformity of your group in terms of overall education and interests. The uniformity assumption also holds in cases where the online students come from the same program or institution and are past their first year of study. For more diverse audiences, research suggests a variety of other group-formation techniques that we will review in future modules.

Collaboration context

All collaborative assignments will be drafted and completed within discussion forums dedicated to each work group and monitored/guided by the instructor. The benefits of frequent group assignments and of including the instructor in the assignment-drafting stages will be discussed at a later time.

Step 4: Technology Checklist

A. Browser and plug-in check

Visit the *System Test* page [http://utconline.utc.edu/system_test.php] at the University of Tennessee to run an automated browser and plug-in test that will help you configure your browser for this Blackboard course. This resource automatically checks a list of ten items, marking items that pass the test in green and items that need attention in red. Follow the

instructions next to items in red to resolve any problem(s) and re-run the test. During our first meeting, you will be provided with a tablet PC that should already be appropriately configured. However, do perform this test on your own computer, to ensure you i) can complete the activities for Module 1 and ii) have access to a working back-up computer for the rest of DOTS.

B. *Wimba* setup

Wimba Classroom is an online-communication tool available through Blackboard. It will allow us to collaborate synchronously online and view and conduct live online presentations. You will receive more information about using the tool later in the program.

For now, we will focus on making your computer *Wimba*-ready.

Your DOTS tablet PC should already be set up to support *Wimba* sessions, but you should also configure an additional machine to ensure you have access to a working back-up computer for the duration of DOTS. To complete the *Wimba* set-up:

1. Choose a computer with a high-speed internet connection, audio/video capabilities, and a large monitor (a laptop's monitor will also work but not as comfortably as a larger screen).
2. Connect a headset that includes a microphone to your computer's headphone and microphone slots (USB headsets are not recommended; use a headset that includes two mini-plugs).
3. Open the *Wimba Classroom Setup Wizard* [<http://67.202.210.80/wizard/wizard.html>] and follow the prompts to test your computer's preparedness in terms of i) pop-up windows, ii) java plug-ins, iii) browser, iv) security settings, and iv) audio. If, at any stage, the test stalls, follow the instructions. The test will have to be restarted after each stall.

If you need assistance, contact *Wimba* Technical Support toll-free at 866-350-4978.

C: *Viddler* sign-up

We will be experimenting with *Viddler*, an easy-to-use video sharing website. *Viddler* enables you to record video straight to a remote server, using your own computer and webcam (or any other digital video camera), and makes it very easy to i) insert markers and written comments at different points in the video and ii) post your video anywhere, including on Blackboard.

We will be working with *Viddler* at a later Module. For now, simply sign up for a *Viddler* account. [<http://www.viddler.com/>]. For assistance see the sign-up instructions [http://www.iddresources.org/dots1long/general/viddler_signup.pdf].

Step 5: Getting Answers and Help

You can find answers to a long list of searchable technical questions, arranged by category, under the "Technical Help" menu item on the course site.

Post additional technical, content, design, or delivery questions on the appropriate forum under the "Discussions" menu item on the course site, to ensure questions/answers are available to all DOTS participants. We will be monitoring these forums two-to-four times a day. You may also contact the facilitators directly, via email ("Email" menu item on the course site).

To give us a broad idea of your involvement with online teaching, take this short, anonymous survey [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=wEvw4ChDhgNQ_2fk5AGlxEq_3d_3d], designed to broadly address online learning background and attitude, and consider using similar instruments in your classes. More on surveys in future modules.