

SUNY Learning Network. <http://sln1.esc.edu/admin/sln/original.nsf>

Follow the link for "Getting Started."

University of Central Florida. <http://reach.ucf.edu/~coursdev/learning/orient/>

Sample Orientation Programs: Specific Software Platforms

George Mason University's WebCT Resource Page. <http://www.irc.gmu.edu/WebCT/default.asp>

Illinois Online's WebBoard Tutorial. <http://illinois.online.uiillinois.edu/online/webboardtutorial/starthere.htm>

IntraKal. <http://www.anlon.com/techsupport/>

An instruction manual can be downloaded.

Web Course in a Box. <http://www.madduck.com/index.html>

WebCT Student Guide. <http://www.webct.com/v2/guide/>



Classroom Management: General Considerations

Classroom management, as we use the term, includes all the organizational and procedural measures that keep a class moving along. Like any class on the ground, an online class can get out of hand if you don't manage it properly. In this chapter, we'll look at record keeping, class communications and participation, and arrangements for team teaching. Chapter 11 will deal with special issues, such as student behavior problems.

Your classroom software, whether a full-scale course management program or simply a set of web pages and discussion boards, will have an impact on your classroom management alternatives. We urge you again, therefore, to become familiar with your software in advance, so that you can exploit its capabilities and compensate for its shortcomings.

Record Keeping and File Management

Teaching online can be a nightmare for record keeping. By the end of a course, there may be thousands of postings and e-mails from students. Where and how will you save this information? How will you organize it?

Begin by finding out what the rules are for the server on which your course is housed. Will material be left on the server after the course is over, or archived in a way accessible to you? Even if you're lucky enough to have such an arrangement, it's a good idea to prepare a system for saving material on your own computer. Moreover, if you intend to save any discussion

materials, it's important to do so at intervals during the course rather than trying to sort through them all at the end.

Tips for Record Keeping

Here are some suggestions for setting up your record-keeping system:

1. When you compose major pieces of information, do so first in your word processing program rather than directly in your online classroom. If you are writing online and your connection is interrupted, you may lose all or part of your material. Also, if you start out in your word processing program—and save your work there—you will already have created an instant “archive” of your material.
2. On your computer's hard drive or on a **Zip disk**, create a series of folders that parallel the divisions of your course. For example, if your course is organized by week, create a folder on your computer for each week and then subfolders for “Discussion,” “Lecture,” “Exercises,” and whatever other components you may have.
3. Create folders for student work on your computer and make sure that you've set up folders for student assignments in your e-mail program. If possible, don't leave students' assignments in your e-mail program only, but download and store them along with the other classroom folders. Some instructors like to house all Assignment #1 papers from students in the same folder, while others keep all assignments from an individual student in a sort of portfolio set aside for him or her alone.

Zip disk A portable hard disk that allows you to store and retrieve files.

You may also find it useful to take notes on the contributions of individual students while you read postings in the discussion forum, particularly in a large or active class. This can be done with simple paper and pen, in your word processing program, or even by copying and pasting representative snippets of a student's postings into a folder for that student. Any measures that help you build up a profile of

individual students will assist you in following their progress and evaluating their work.

4. Make sure that all student e-mail is sorted automatically or manually as it arrives at your e-mail address. One of the greatest organizational perils is e-mail from students that becomes commingled with e-mail from other sources. This results in misplaced assignments and late responses to communications.

If you're working from a business account or a personal e-mail account, you may want to consider establishing a separate e-mail address for your class communications. There are many free e-mail services available on the Web. However, be certain to ask whether the service includes the ability to send and receive attachments, because you will need that option.

5. As noted in Chapter 4, make sure you specify how students should use the subject line in e-mail communications with you. For example, you may want to specify that the subject line consist of *student's first name + last initial + number of assignment*. Gently remind class members if there are lapses (and there will be) during the progress of the course.

Extend this system to students' attachments as well: Make sure that students put their name and assignment number in the body of the attached text itself. Often, attachments are downloaded and saved separately from the e-mails that delivered them. In this case, if students remember to affix their names and assignment numbers, you will be able to print out assignments, if you wish, without having to guess who authored each paper!

Relabel assignments and e-mails if necessary before saving them to folders. Keeping the nomenclature uniform will enable you to sort quickly through your students' contributions. This is a valuable time saver.

Electronic Files Versus Hard Copy

In contemplating the multitude of online activities and student assignments, you may be wondering how much you need to read online and how much you should download and print out.

This is really a personal choice. However, don't feel somehow less "cyber-expert" if you want to print out and read most assignments or even some discussion offline. It can be very hard on the eyes to read a great deal online. Some instructors print out and read *all* assignments offline, preferring to make their notes in the paper margins while on the train, at the coffee shop, or lying in bed. Others read the papers offline but make their notes in word-processed documents, which they then copy and paste into their e-mailed correspondence with their students.

The same issues apply to record keeping. If you want to keep paper records as well as electronic ones, that's fine. In any case, always keep a backup copy—either on disk or on paper—of your gradebook and any other important class records. You may want to have a paper chart that you use while online, to tick off credits for student participation as you read. This may save you the time and bother of having to toggle back and forth between the classroom and your word processing program. You may also want to keep a paper journal of events in your class.

You may have to experiment to find out which system works best for you. The factors to balance here are flexibility, economy of time, security of records, and the health issues related to total time spent online.

Managing Communications

Not surprisingly, many online classroom management issues involve communication—between you and your students, and among the students themselves. Designing an effective communication system and monitoring it are key steps in teaching online.

Creating a Uniform Announcement Area

You need some area within your course where students know they can receive the latest updates and corrections. If you cannot easily update a web page area linked to the course's home page, consider using a mailing list to e-mail students your updates. If you have a discussion board, you can also choose

that as your venue: Let students know from the first day of class that, each time they log in, they should check a particular area for the latest announcements.

It's a good habit to make regular announcements on a weekly or biweekly basis—to keep students on task, even if there are no special changes or updates to announce. Simply give an overview of the week ahead or of upcoming due dates for assignments and exams.

Here are a few examples of the types of information that might appear in announcements:

1. Reminding students about upcoming due dates and stages of the course:

As we start week 5, all of you should now have chosen your topics for the final essay. It's a good idea to start outlining your ideas now for the rough draft that will be due at the end of week 6.

2. Offering a preview or overview of the week's activities to reinforce the students' attention to tasks:

This week we will be focusing on the romantic poets. Be sure to visit at least one or two of the recommended web sites for additional background information before taking part in the discussion about the readings.

3. Taking stock of progress and encouraging students:

We are now entering the seventh week of the course. I am pleased that so many of you are participating in the weekly discussion forums and that the quality of those conversations is so evident. Nearly all of you have turned in your journal entries for week 6. You can expect to receive your grades and comments from me during the next week. Feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions about how I determined your grade.

4. Noting problems in computer access:

Our server experienced a shutdown this morning from 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. EST. If you tried to access the classroom at that time, you would have received an error message.

5. Updating, clarifying, or changing the syllabus or schedule:

Please note the following change in the reading for this week: pages 10–25 in White (not 110–125 as recorded on the syllabus). Quiz #2 will be postponed until after the holidays—therefore, it has not yet been posted. Also, there will be no on-campus meeting this week, due to the holidays. However, I will be holding live online chats throughout this week, by prior e-mail appointment only. Student groups who hoped to meet on campus are encouraged to use the live chat as well.

6. Reminding students about special events or introducing speakers:

This week we are fortunate to have as our guest Dr. Basstone. I have posted Dr. Basstone's lecture in Unit Three. He will be available on Tuesday and Thursday of this week only to answer your questions in Discussion Forum Three.

Setting Rules for E-Mail

One key to handling the e-mail problem—the potential deluge of e-mail you may receive—is to divert individual e-mail, as much as possible, into the common classroom space. This prevents your having to make the same response over and over again, and it also has the positive effect of promoting students' consciousness of the online classroom as a shared space, not simply an assemblage of web pages. If you make your presence felt primarily in the online classroom and only secondarily in the private e-mail realm, your students will look for you in that public space. When you receive an e-mailed question or comment that isn't really private in nature, praise the student and encourage her or him by requesting that the student post the item in the classroom—or offer to do so yourself.

Joan Morris, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Central Florida, in her web page "Scaling Up Class Size in Web Courses" (<http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~jmorris/resources/ScalingUp2.html>), suggests developing a protocol for asking questions in large classes. For example, she suggests that you can encourage students to pose a question first to their discussion group before e-mailing you about it. Another recommen-

dation from her web page is that you establish a forum for the purpose of asking questions about the class; after posting a question in the forum, students would be expected to wait twenty-four hours for an adequate answer before separately e-mailing you with the question.

These modes of behavior will not evolve among students on their own—you must set the rules and procedures early in your course and carefully consider how to structure the channels of communication.

Encouraging Participation and Managing Your Workload

Most instructors would like to promote as much interaction as possible in an online class—not only between instructor and students, but student to student as well. Instructors who run large, lecture hall, on-campus courses with an online component would perhaps like to use the online environment not only to replace some of the lecture time, but also to give students additional opportunities for discussion, presentation of projects to their classmates, and other forms of participation that are difficult to manage in a large classroom meeting. In Chapter 6, we discussed the variety of activities you can set in motion to engage students. Here we want to take a look at how you can promote participation in these activities. At the same time, we will examine how the choice and design of activities may affect your workload.

Two factors determine the level and quality of participation and interaction in a class—your design and student dynamics. The second part of this formula, student dynamics, is really no different online than in the on-campus classroom or discussion seminar. Students will bring their own expectations and work habits to your online classroom. To some degree, you will be able to shape and influence their behavior, but in other respects it's the luck of the draw. Experienced instructors can fairly quickly identify the core group of students who are active participants (perhaps including obnoxious students as well as the

most delightful), and these can be enlisted to get the classroom dynamics moving. Here, though, the factor of course design comes into play as well: Instructors need to design the course so that other students are drawn into the orbit of the core group and begin to participate, even if in different ways and to a lesser degree. The trick is to get enough of the reluctant or shy students to be active in the classroom, at least occasionally, to make the class more diverse and interesting for all.

The Effect of Class Size

The way you use classroom design and organization to promote student participation will probably depend on the class size. As in the handling of e-mail, your own workload can become an important factor in your decisions. Let's look at the issues involved in an online classroom or online component for classes of various sizes.

Classes of 10 to 30 Students If you have a class of only 10 students, your major problem will be how to encourage participation and student-to-student interaction. Given that, in a class of 10, perhaps only 3 to 5 students will have a tendency to be very active, while the others will be nearly inactive or only moderately active, that group of 3 to 5 may become discouraged, fatigued, or bored if it spends most of the course carrying the load for the entire class. While you can give each of your students more individual attention than in a larger class, you presumably would like to avoid having the course become a de facto independent study class. So you have a real incentive to encourage student-to-student participation.

With a class of 20, you may have several active coteries of students, and if even half of the students are active in discussions, they can potentially generate hundreds of messages for you to read—not to mention homework or exercises. You need to achieve a balance of energy between relating to students as individuals and relating to groups of students. This means not only getting students to talk to one another, but also apportioning your assignments and activities so that at least a few are group efforts or involve peer contributions.

In a class of 30, your potential problems are your workload and the risk that students will disappear into the corners of cyberspace. In a class of 30 on the ground, you can see the

rows of students and generally keep track of them visually. Online, you really do have to remember the names and check your records and notes to keep track of all of them. At this level, group work and presentations become a necessary part of your course design. You'll want to create smaller groups for the purposes of at least some discussion topics and projects. This arrangement will give shy students a more comfortable environment for airing their views and asking questions. It will also allow students to form social connections with other students and build up a sense of camaraderie. In any class of more than 20 students, you will probably also want to use some type of self-assessment or an automatic assessment vehicle such as online testing.

Classes of 40 to 100 Students (or More) Beyond 30 or so students, you will find it difficult to operate without the assistance of a TA. In our comments we will assume the addition of teaching assistants or else an arrangement for team teaching with other instructors.

In a class of 40 or more students, even with a TA, you must interact more with groups of students than with individuals. In such classes, if possible, you should use online testing with automatic grading for at least one-third to one-half of your assessments, and you should have students working in groups and making presentations to the entire class.

In such a large class, discussion forums can be established for groups of 10 to 15 students. You and your TA can then observe the groups, noting the interaction and responding when necessary. You can think of this as the party-host model. You and your colleague circulate among the various groups of guests, joining in on conversations at times and making sure there are no wall-flowers sitting by themselves.

In order for students to benefit from ideas and questions that arise in groups other than their own, you should set up dual levels of the classroom—one for the entire class and the other for the group level of organization. Establish a forum where students can ask general questions about the course; this will prevent your having to answer these questions in each group. But also establish discussion areas where student representatives from each group can address the topics of discussion with the entire class.

The Debate About Class Size

Most instructors are aware that class sizes of totally online courses have become an issue on many campuses. Often overlooked in this discussion are the basic assumptions about the instructor's role in the online classroom, the nature of the course, and the design considerations that are appropriate for the course.

Some suggest that the real discussion should focus on what is happening in on-campus courses. In other words, is the lecture hall of 300 students, followed by the once-a-week small discussion section, a model that we want to continue? It's certainly one of the most economical arrangements as long as you have the physical plant to support it. It has proved effective for many students, though for others it generates only apathy and poor results.

We will state one point quite emphatically here:

Important! *You can't have a high level of individual student-instructor interaction in an online class of 40 or more students.*

One instructor should not be asked to handle such a class alone unless the course is designed to be merely lecture with automatic assessment and mainly student-to-student interaction. Some institutions have applied the same rules to online courses as to their on-campus versions—for example, one TA for every 20 to 25 students if a class exceeds 40 students.

Applying such equations is generally a good start. However, the cut-off point for the "average" class served by one instructor should be lower for a completely online class than for an on-campus version. From the experience of those who have taught in both formats, it appears that one instructor in an on-campus class can comfortably handle a class of 30 to 50 by herself, whereas the equivalent online is closer to 15 to 30 students, with the latter number dependent on the level of instructor-student interaction desired in the class.

Some instructors who have taught online would put the number even lower—say, 15 to 20 students for one instructor. Although this estimate may come from a heartfelt reaction based on their experience, it cannot necessarily be applied to all cases. Our observation is that many who teach online automatically fall into a pattern of very intense instructor-generated activity and a great deal of one-on-one interaction. In fact,

(cont.)

the workload issue is usually the number one complaint of first-time online instructors, whether they have 15 students or 25.

The very seductiveness of the online environment, with its seemingly endless avenues of communication, can cause an instructor to become far more interactive online than he or she would be in a regular on-campus class. Student expectations also play a role here: Online students tend to be more demanding and to need more affirmation and attention than their on-campus counterparts. Further, the fact that one can see and review one's interactions with students may make an instructor acutely self-conscious and eager to respond more often and more elaborately than in an on-campus class.

While this high level of instructor responsiveness may be a desirable thing in itself, it may not be practical for some programs to have classes small enough to make it feasible. Programs should ideally base such decisions on the type of course. For example, if the course involves many assignments that must be manually graded and requires lots of one-on-one supervision and criticism, 15 to 20 students is a realistic number. But many courses that seem ideal at 15 could be redesigned to comfortably fit 20, albeit with some loss in the instructor's interaction with individual students.

For example, in week 3, if students are discussing the chapter reading assigned on the French Revolution, you might have students meet first in their groups to discuss and summarize the main ideas of the chapter on Robespierre or to reach some conclusions about the dominant causes of the Revolution. You would set a time limit for these group discussions to conclude. Then you would post the same discussion question or assignment in the discussion forum for the entire class, asking the student spokespersons for the various groups to exchange and discuss their groups' ideas.

When there are individual assignments for a large class, you can choose examples that typify the responses and the problems encountered, then post these anonymously (without the student's name attached) for all students to view. In this way you can create a lesson by means of your comments. This method works best for courses with much factual or objective material—

computer science, math, and so forth. For courses that involve more subjective responses, you can spotlight those you think are full or good responses. Some instructors do this by creating presentation pages, while others use the discussion forum areas for this purpose. To comment on problems the students may be encountering, you can derive principles and illustrations from the poorer student work without actually posting individual examples.

Finding a Balance Between Student-Centered and Instructor-Centered Activities

No matter what the class size, most students appreciate a balance between student-centered activities and those that focus on the instructor. In other words, they want the instructor to contribute something unique, something they can't "get from the book," but they also respond well to an environment that asks them to be active participants in their own learning.

In a class of 15, you might wish to do away with the formal lecture mode and simply provide a segmented lecture as described in Chapter 3: a running commentary of short paragraphs that offers the initial material—the thread topics—on which students can base their discussion. But in a larger class, you will want to provide a more structured presentation of instructor-generated materials. Students would quickly lose their way if they had to find the tidbits of lecture material hidden among hundreds of discussion topics or anecdotal comments.

Your ideal mix of instructor-generated and student-based activity depends on the number of students; the length of the course (for instance, whether there is enough time for several projects and how long students will have to get organized for group efforts); the number of TAs you have (if any); and any matters related to the level or type of course you teach. We recommend that you include some calculations for your ideal mix in the planning stage for your course.

Some General Guidelines for Student Participation

One of the most effective ways to promote student participation in an online class is to make it required and graded. As explained

in Chapter 4, this should be clearly stated in your syllabus, and the criteria must be defined.

Participation online ranges from "attendance"—defined as logging on and (presumably) reading in the online classroom—to actually posting messages in discussion forums and taking part in small group activities. It is not possible to gauge pure attendance unless you have tracking features in your software that monitor the opening of files or time spent in a particular portion of the classroom. These tracking capabilities, as we said in Chapter 5, can help give you a clearer picture of a student's activities, but they are generally not sufficient for assessment purposes. For example, they may tell you that a student opened up a particular document and kept it open for a period of time, but not whether the student actually read the document. So it's best to think of the information you gain from these features, if you're lucky enough to have them, as merely a small piece in the puzzle.

To be an effective goad to activity, participation grades for a completely online class should constitute somewhere between 10 and 40 percent of the student's overall grade. If you include a separate category for contribution to small group activities, you might end up with 50 percent of the grade in the "participation" category. For an online component in a face-to-face course, we recommend that at least 10 percent of the total grade for the course be reserved for online participation.

You may want to establish criteria for both quantity and quality of participation. For instance, one-third of the participation grade might be based on the student's meeting a minimum quantity level (say, posting a comment or question in the discussion forum once a week), with the remaining two-thirds based on the quality of participation. Or, if your course involves lots of teamwork, you might divide the participation grade between individual accomplishments and contributions to the group.

Depending on your course objectives, presentations—either group or individual—may be an essential part of student participation. You might define participation to mean completing all weekly classroom exercises, taking part in discussions, *and* presenting a project to the class. The use of presentations—either group or individual—fosters interaction among students, but it

is most effective if you emphasize that student comments and questions about their classmates' presentations are counted in participation grades or are separately graded.

Important! *However you choose to define "participation," make sure that the greater part of the grade depends on what the student does in the shared classroom, not simply on the completion of assignments submitted to you alone.*

So think about how you can structure opportunities for student-to-student interaction—it's not something that will necessarily happen without your deliberate effort.

Tips for Fostering Asynchronous Discussion

In Chapter 5, we discussed the impact that a particular discussion software structure may have on the way you organize your discussions. However, no matter how your software may be organized, there are techniques you can use to foster greater participation and clarity among your students.

1. *Start the major topic threads yourself.* It's a good idea for the instructor to start all major topic threads. If you wish to (and your software permits), you can allow students to contribute additional threads as they feel the need. This arrangement should be considered with great care, however, because students often tend to create new topics without real necessity, and your discussion area may soon be overwhelmed with too many threads on duplicate topics.
2. *Narrow down topics.* A good discussion needs pruning and shaping. An overly broad topic thread—say, "The French Revolution: What Do You Think of It?"—will often result in very fragmented discussion. This is especially true in an introductory class, in which most students know little about the subject. If you divide up broad topics into logical subtopics—say, "Economic Conditions on the Eve of the Revolution" or "The Execution of the Royal Family"—you can prevent the discussion from going off in too many directions. In an introductory class, you may want to provide even more guidance. For example, a discussion based on

specific readings in the textbook, on a focused web site visit, or on assigned exercises, coupled with your guideline questions, will likely be more productive of a fruitful discussion than simply pointing students to the forum and expecting them to find their own direction.

A short series of closely related questions can allow students to jump in on any one of the points and still find themselves "on topic." In our example of the French Revolution, a topic thread might contain several questions about the economic conditions: "What were the land-holding patterns? How important was foreign trade? Had the average well-being of the citizens improved or worsened in the years leading up to the Revolution?"

However, Tisha Bender, who was a trainer for SUNY Learning Network and the New School's DIAL program and who has been an online instructor for many years, reminds us that a factual question for which there is only one answer (such as "When was the Battle of Waterloo?") can't be expected to generate a discussion. She suggests that the best discussions arise from questions that may not have only one answer. She also points out that instructors can set guidelines so that students know they can go against the prevailing opinion as long as they can substantiate their views.

The shaping of discussions takes some genuine forethought. You might think of this task as similar to creating chapters in a book or long article you are writing. Threads will stay of manageable length if you keep topics specific and allow a place such as a lounge or question-and-answer forum for off-topic conversations.

Sometimes, of course, a thread goes off on a digression that is so valuable and interesting in itself that you don't want to curb it. The pruning and organization of threads is for the purpose of sustaining discussion, not stifling it. Allow students to digress, but if you think that the new direction in the conversation calls for an entirely new thread, you might create one or suggest that a student begin a new topic message to explore the subject further.

3. *Organize forums and threads to reflect the class chronology or sequence.* The organization of discussion forums should

complement the class structure but also provide some reminders of the course chronology and sequence. For example, if forums are the outer level of your discussion structure, creating one for each week or unit of the course helps students know at a glance where they should be looking for that week's activity. Even if you don't have an outer forum structure, you can designate all the threads for a particular week under the rubric "Week 1" or "Unit I."

If you have a general forum area for ongoing questions about the course, you might want to divide this up by week so that students can more easily find questions that pertain to a particular week's activities.

4. *Key the thread topics to appropriate activities.* Keying thread topics to the assignments, readings, projects, and exercises for a particular week will help keep students on topic in their discussions and also provide an obvious place to discuss anything that occurs in the course during that week.
5. *Establish a pattern of frequent response.* Students tend to follow instructor expectations for online participation, and these expectations are communicated not only by the declarations of the syllabus but also by the instructor's behavior. During the first week or so, if your class size allows (this would be in a class of no more than 30 students), greet all students individually in the classroom as they arrive and engage as many as possible in discussion. Then make an effort to respond to a diverse group of students each week—not just to the same one or two individuals. If you have a large class, you will find yourself rotating your time among all the small groups, as well as tending to any all-class forums.

Rather than engaging in long, concentrated visits to your classroom, it is best to establish a pattern of short but frequent activity. When students see you "poke your head into" the classroom (that is, see your postings), it makes them feel that you are truly present and actively responding to the class. In contrast, when students see that an instructor only rarely engages with them, they are discouraged from posing questions and comments aimed even indirectly at the instructor, and they may also conclude that the instructor will be unaware of what is going on in the classroom.

Think in terms of three to five short periods of logging on each week, rather than the one or two sessions you may be used to in your on-campus courses. If you have only four hours to devote to the classroom in one week, spend an hour for each of four days in the classroom, rather than two hours twice a week. This will allow you to keep up with the flow of student discussions and will also reinforce the impression that you are responsive and on the scene.

If you are teaching a primarily on-campus course that meets once a week and also has an online component, you will have to decide how important student discussion online will be in your class. If you really want students to make use of this venue, then you, too, must actively attend to it. The discussion forum is a great place for you to continue conversations you started in class or for the TA to extend the weekly discussion section. Initiate topics on a weekly basis and require some weekly participation from students in the online forum. This is also the best place to update the class on changes and errors, to pose and answer questions, and to help students review material. Again, unless you are actively "showing the flag" in this area, students will quickly learn that they can ignore it with impunity.

6. *Facilitate and build on participation.* Don't try to respond to every posting in the classroom. Even in a class of 20, this will quickly overwhelm you. Also, you want to encourage students to interact with each other, not only with you. So make comments that address a whole train of thought—responding, for example, to five or six related messages in the thread rather than to each of the five individually. In this way you will do your part to encourage participation as well as interaction among students.

Think about jumping in or tending to the conversational fires at critical junctures, working as a facilitator to help move the discussion forward and keep the fire going. Tisha Bender remarks that your experience in the on-campus classroom should provide some cues for you online as well: "Base your behavior on what you normally would do in a classroom discussion. Make your point where you would normally feel it's appropriate to do so."

Don't merely post friendly expressions of affirmation. You should also contribute comments that summarize what students have posted, as well as follow-up questions that stimulate further discussion. In some cases, it might be appropriate to invite students' responses to their classmates' ideas: "Anyone else want to comment on Tom's observation?" "Did anyone reach a different conclusion about this issue?"

If a class is fairly quiet, it may seem that it's a good idea to jump in and reply as soon as someone finally posts something. The truth is, instructors feel uncomfortable when nobody's talking. But Tisha Bender reminds us that "it's not only about your own comfort level." Sometimes, particularly in the beginning when the group dynamic is just becoming established, "you need to hold back and let it happen rather than pouncing on a single response."

There are also times when there will be a lull in conversations because students are working on a major assignment. Some instructors may even schedule a "quiet time," such as a few days during which students are encouraged to devote most of their time to a project.

7. *Be aware of cultural patterns as well as differences in personal styles in discussion.* If you have a classroom that includes students from another country, be alert and request information from informants (rather than making assumptions) about the best way to ask questions. For example, a group of students from China or Taiwan may not respond very well to questions and topics that call for volunteered responses. In this case, a question like "Anyone want to comment on this?" is better altered to "Please post your response to this question by Wednesday afternoon."

Be aware, too, that not all students respond well to the same approaches to discussion. For example, some students respond poorly to a question that asks them to share personal experiences, while others are not at all shy about divulging information about their background and preferences. We think it's important to respect these differences and not make students feel boxed in by the way you frame a

question. A way around this problem can be to split the question in such a way as to offer an alternative: "Can you relate this to your own experience or one you have heard or read about?"

Tips for Establishing Effective Synchronous Communication

The most common form of synchronous communication available to instructors is text-based chat. Voice-enhanced and video-enhanced chat are becoming more widely available, but at this point they aren't often used in online classroom situations.

You should carefully consider any requirement that students participate in chat as a graded assignment. When students live on campus, chat arrangements are not a difficult problem, but if your group includes working adults or students from other time zones, chat can be a real impediment to their full participation in the class. In such cases, you will have to be very flexible about scheduling times for chat. As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is best to offer some variety in the choice of times. If possible, too, you should copy the chat to post asynchronously for the benefit of those who cannot attend. If you are supervising group work, request that groups post their chat transcripts in a group asynchronous area or e-mail it to all the group's members and to you.

Here are some further tips for organizing an instructor-led chat with more than one student:

1. Try to limit group chats to four or five participants.
2. If you must have a group of more than five students, establish a system for granting turns to speak. If your chat software includes a crowd-control function (the equivalent of raising hands to be recognized), then you should definitely make use of it. If your software doesn't have such a built-in system, you can design one: for instance, a question mark, asterisk, or some other sign that, when typed, will appear next to the student's name, allowing you to recognize him or her to speak.
3. Allow some time at either the beginning or the end of the chat for students to ask off-topic questions and to socialize.

Chat: Benefits Versus Drawbacks

Let's be honest about the shortcomings of chat communication. Chat is often productive of disjointed or widely digressing conversations, sloppy or impressionistic responses, bad spelling, poor grammar, and flippant attitudes.

The lines of communication are often out of sync. While you're typing your response, the others may already have moved on to other questions. An instructor-led chat with more than five people quickly becomes difficult to follow. In fact, real-time chat is probably the most exhausting, intensive activity an online instructor will ever encounter. Your attention must be attuned to rapid-fire comments and questions from several students; you must respond quickly, and, if your typing ability isn't the best, you may struggle to keep up with more nimble-fingered students.

Given all these shortcomings, why use chat at all? And when is it most appropriate or effective? Here are some answers:

1. One use of chat is to provide reinforcement and immediate feedback for students. When there are no face-to-face meetings in the course, chat can provide a forum for such communication.
2. Virtual office hours and personal consultation can be provided by chat. It can serve in lieu of an e-mail or phone conversation, or provide clarification for communications by those methods. For example, you may have a student who writes cryptic e-mails with key information missing. You may be able to clarify his questions via a real-time chat. If a whiteboard feature is available as well, you might be able to assist a student with a problem that requires more hands-on demonstration. You might also want to schedule individual chats with students for the purpose of asking follow-up questions about their work.
3. The social aspect of chat may be one of the most important uses. Students may appreciate the opportunity to use chat among themselves without its being an official class activity. It can help students form bonds with others in the class. Whole-class or group chats may add to the sense of cohesion among group members. Some students miss the spontaneous interaction common to on-campus classes, and chat may provide a suitable outlet for humorous exchanges, social chatter, and team-building conversations.
4. Chat may be used in conjunction with asynchronous group areas for group project meetings and discussions. Typical reasons for holding a chat are brainstorming and finalizing unresolved issues.

(cont.)

5. Chat may be used to bring in a guest speaker. This is best done in conjunction with an assigned paper or lecture by the guest, and it may follow the guest's participation in an asynchronous discussion for a period of a few days. This technique is most effective when you adequately prepare students for the guest chat. You should time the chat to coordinate with associated activities and give students an interval to formulate questions they can pose to the guest.

Announce this before the chat or at the opening of the session. Budget an extra two minutes as well, just for greetings and goodbyes.

4. Limit each session to approximately forty-five minutes and announce the time limit before the chat. A forty-five-minute period allows for the social niceties that smooth the way, as well as some spontaneity, but also provides a substantial period of time during which all can focus on the preannounced topics.
5. Prepare students for the chat by posting the topics or agenda, assigning readings or activities, or giving them questions to consider before the chat. Ask them to keep these questions or notes at their side while chatting. Have ready your own notes or outline so that you can keep track of all the items on the agenda. In some chat software, students entering late can't read anything that was said before their entrance. In such cases, strongly emphasize in advance that students should appear on time. You won't have time to keep recapitulating the "plot."
6. Whenever possible, preface your response with the name of the student to whom you are replying, or include bits of the question or comment to which you are responding. Using student names is particularly effective when you answer two students in one reply.

Joe, I think reading the book before seeing the film would be best. No, Elsa, Exercise 1 is not due the day after tomorrow.

Including bits of the question also helps pinpoint the object of your response. This is often necessary when several comments have been made in rapid succession.

Joe, book before film is best, but, as Linda reminds us, there are some films that are merely loose adaptations of books.

7. Remember that students can't hear you thinking or typing. They are often impatient in chat, trying to keep alert and anticipating your answers. So, in a fast-paced chat with more than one or two students, break up any long responses into two or three parts. This will let students know you're actually formulating a reply, not ignoring what they've said:

First response: Joe, book before film is best, but,

Second response: as Linda reminds us, there are some films that are merely loose adaptations of books, while

Third response: at the same time it is true that some books are created after the fact, to capitalize on interest in a movie.

This technique can also help you set the pace of the chat. Students automatically slow down, knowing that you're still sending your response. A similar slowdown tactic is to type just the student's name with a comma and send that, and then send the rest of the message in your next segment. As students see "Joe," they will await the remaining phrase, "book before film is best."

8. Have a backup plan in place, in the event that you or some of the students lose the Internet connection. For example, note all participants as they come in, so that you can e-mail everyone in the event of a break in your own connection. If you have twenty-four-hour technical support, make sure the phone number is available, in case students who are cut off cannot access their e-mail.

Team Teaching Online

Team teaching, whether online or on the ground, presents some unique challenges as well as opportunities. Students can derive the benefit of the multiple perspectives and teaching

styles brought by two instructors, while instructors may appreciate the intellectual stimulation of the collaboration as well as the prospect of sharing some of their duties and workload. However, instructors who have experience with team teaching know that being half of a two-member team doesn't necessarily mean doing only half the work. Moreover, the difficulties involved in coordination can be legion.

Important! *Team teaching online requires even more advance planning than its on-the-ground counterpart.*

Even though you and your colleague aren't together in a physical classroom setting, you are very much occupying the same online classroom space, and you can easily trip over each other there as well! Once teaching begins, differences in teaching style and approaches will invariably appear, so it's best to discuss your pedagogical approach as well as practical procedures before the course begins.

Avoid team-teaching a course with fewer than fifteen students. Tisha Bender notes that, in her experience, the presence of two instructors can easily overwhelm a small group of students, dampening all participation, while a larger class can really appreciate the added instructor attention.

There are three basic models you can adopt in team teaching: shared responsibility, division of labor, and primary-secondary. Let's look at each of them in turn.

The Shared Responsibility Model

In the shared responsibility model, both instructors do everything; that is, each of you shares the responsibility for all activities in the class. Online, this means that both of you read and respond to all discussions and assignments. Students will know which instructor is which in the discussion forum, because your name will appear next to your comments.

Assignments can be graded by consensus (very time consuming if you're communicating with each other only online) or by averaging. However, unless you have an online gradebook, one of you will have to take charge of notifying students

of grades and passing along the corresponding comments by e-mail. If you wish, you can sign both names to the grade and add comments.

One risk in this form of team teaching is that students may not know whom to address with a particular question. Students may also become confused by the two instructors' different teaching styles and approaches. No matter how much we instructors like to imagine that we have a student-centered classroom and an antiauthoritarian style, students do tend to adjust themselves to the prevailing classroom mode that we set.

This model of team teaching also presents some of the same problems encountered by two parents. You want to be two individuals, offering different opinions, but you don't want to contradict or undermine each other. You must also avoid being played off, one against the other, by students.

A further risk of this model is that neither one of the instructors may have the course firmly in focus. Areas of the course can become relatively neglected if no one takes responsibility for them. Finally, this model can be exhausting for instructors because not only are they responsible for teaching the entire class, but they also must spend additional time coordinating with the other member of the team.

Nevertheless, in some situations you may decide that the shared responsibility model is the best approach for you. If so, here are some tips on making this "everything" model work:

1. Ask students to send any e-mailed queries to both instructors.
2. Each instructor must assiduously read all discussion threads in the class. If one instructor has more comments than the other on a particular topic, that's fine, but the other should make at least a few responses to the same topic.
3. In your syllabus or introductory messages, clearly state the procedures for students to contact you and to submit assignments.
4. For grading and evaluating student work and participation, work out a procedure that you can easily follow. If you're meeting with your co-teacher online, you'll need a way to smoothly exchange any e-mailed assignments and to maintain record keeping as well.

The Division of Labor Model

The division of labor model involves just what the name suggests: The two instructors divide their responsibilities according to a prearranged plan. Like the shared responsibility model, division of labor also requires a great deal of planning and coordination, but it is generally easier to implement.

The division of labor may be arranged by weeks (Joe for week 1, Mary for week 2); by topics (which may overlap with weeks); by types of class activities (Mary handles the research project, and Joe supervises all group reports); or by a combination of these factors (Joe takes on the research project and weeks 2, 4, and 6 of the discussion, while Mary handles all individual presentations and weeks 1, 3, and 5 of the discussion). You may also want to have some activities handled separately by each of the two instructors, while other activities are a joint effort.

The biggest risk in this model is that one instructor may lose track of the classroom while the other instructor is taking his or her turn. Here are some tips for making the division of labor model most effective and least frustrating:

1. Make sure each instructor contributes something to the overall effort. This contribution should start with the selection of texts and planning of class activities.
2. Decide how you wish to divide up the classroom responsibilities, and state the arrangement in your syllabus so that students know who has the primary responsibility for any particular activity.
3. Make sure that your introductions during the first week of class, or your comments during the first topic of discussion, are carried out jointly with your co-teacher.
4. Ask students to cc the other instructor on any queries sent to one instructor. This will ensure that each instructor is kept "in the loop."

cc An e-mail function that allows you to send copies of a message to one or more people other than the main recipient; the term, borrowed from old-fashioned business usage, was originally an abbreviation for *carbon copy*.

5. Even if you divide up the discussion responsibilities by week, make sure that the instructor not assigned to that duty in a particular week reads through the discussion. The "off-duty" instructor might want to make a comment as well, and he or she can best do so after the other instructor and the students have had their say.
6. Divide up grading of assignments as evenly as possible but in alternating cycles so that neither instructor loses track of students. In other words, Joe grades assignments 1 and 3, while Mary does 2 and 4. Each instructor should cc the other on any e-mailed evaluation comments to a student. Each instructor should have copies of all grades and comments. If there is no central gradebook online, the two instructors need to keep identical records. This may mean that, after each grading turn is taken, the instructor who did the grading e-mails a list of grades to the other.

The Primary-Secondary Model

In the primary-secondary model, one instructor assumes the primary or dominant role in managing the class. This approach is necessary when one instructor cannot participate in the class to the same extent as the other, yet is still making an active contribution. For example, one instructor may have less Internet access or more workload issues than the other, or one instructor may feel less expert in certain areas of course content.

Tips for making the primary-secondary model work include the following:

1. Make sure that each person is fully aware of the responsibilities he or she has agreed to take on. Work this out by going over the week-by-week activities of the course.
2. Try to balance the workload to each person's satisfaction. If one instructor cannot participate online as much as the other, for instance, let him or her take on more of the record-keeping duties or slightly more of the grading of assignments.
3. Clearly indicate to students the respective responsibilities for each instructor, but ask students to cc each instructor on any e-mail correspondence sent to the other.

4. If one instructor does not have as much uninterrupted web access as the other (this would be particularly true for partners who have no home access), set up a system so that the partner with good access does the posting. For example, if you need to post a message but lack ready access to the web page or discussion forum, you can e-mail the material to your partner, who can then post it for you. In this case, your name, as the instructor who wrote the actual message, should be typed at the top of the message itself (because the posting will automatically bear the name of the person who puts it online). Students need to be reminded about this practice to avoid confusion about the two instructors' contributions.

Resources

Keeping Online Asynchronous Discussions on Topic. http://www.aln.org/alnweb/journal/Vol3_issue2/beaudin.htm

This article by Bart Beaudin, from Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks 3, no. 2 (November 1999), presents results of research into techniques used by instructors in managing asynchronous online discussion.

Keeping the Thread: Adapting Conversational Practice to Help Distance Students and Instructors Manage Discussions in an Asynchronous Learning Network. http://www.ed.psu.edu/acsde/deos/deosnews/deosnews9_2.asp

In this 1999 article from DEOSNEWS 9, no. 2, Donald J. Winiecki compares the patterns of face-to-face and online asynchronous conversations and suggests some strategies for more effective communication.

Scaling Up Class Size in Web Courses. <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~jmorris/resources/ScalingUp2.html>

Joan Morris from the University of Central Florida offers strategies for handling workload in online courses.