

# TEACHING ELEMENTS: INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT INTERACTION ONLINE

## INTRODUCING YOURSELF AND YOUR COURSE

1.0 | MARCH 2014

Because asynchronous online teaching and learning is highly “text-centric,” converting your campus course to online (or blended) delivery entails a shift from spoken language to written language as the central mode of communication. Oral communication tends to be fast-paced, spontaneous, fleeting, and less structured than text-based communication. Moreover, oral communication in a face-to-face context provides multiple non-verbal or paralinguistic cues such as facial expression and tone of voice. Socially and emotionally, face-to-face oral communication is a rich medium.

In contrast, written communication might be termed a lean medium, in that much of the information that creates and sustains the group dynamic of face-to-face classes is simply not transmitted. When a text-based medium, such as myCourses, is used for educational purposes, questions may arise as to whether this “leaning down” through the screening out of much non-verbal and paralinguistic communication detracts from the quality of learning. On the other hand, text-based online communication would appear to offer not only potential deficiencies, but also some advantages. One such advantage is that text-based communication provides time from reflection, which may foster critical thinking.

Nevertheless, in writing your online or blended course introduction (or “welcome to the course” message) or your own self-introduction as part of an icebreaker assignment, your objective is fostering social presence, not critical thinking. In the Community of Inquiry model, social presence is defined as the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities.

Here are a few ideas and/or questions to get you started in effecting social presence, or projecting your presence as “an individual person” in your course and self-introductions:

### COURSE INTRODUCTION (WELCOME TO THE COURSE)

Your initial welcome message is typically posted on your Course Homepage in the News area of myCourses, but you can also email it to students shortly before the start of classes.

- Think about how these “first words” will help to set the tone and expectations for your course. For example, how do they model appropriate online communication for your students?
- Convey a sense of enthusiasm about the content and the form of the course.
- Include some information about yourself so students get a sense of who you are.
- Positively reinforce the information in the syllabus.
- Indicate your availability for questions and communication, and your communication preferences. Let students know that they are not stranded on their own when it comes to online learning.

## YOUR SELF-INTRODUCTION

Like your course introduction, your self-introduction an icebreaker assignment is a critical opportunity to present yourself as a “real person.”

- Be aware of the negative persona (voices and roles) that you *do not* want to present, such as the “unapproachable sage,” “apathetic drone,” or “chum.”
- Again, state your enthusiasm for both the content and form of the course and include some touchstones about yourself.
- Clarify how you want students to address you and each other.
- Explain your “philosophy of teaching” in simple terms, especially as it relates to online learning.

## RESOURCES

Conrad, R., and Donaldson, J. (2004). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.

Ko, S., and Rossen, S. (2010). *Teaching online: A practical guide*. Routledge: New York, NY, and London.

Warnock, S. (2009). *Teaching writing online: How and way*. National Council of Teachers of English: Urban