

Fall 2020 Guidelines for Remote Teaching

This fall, universities across the globe face unprecedented challenges as they attempt to maintain the integrity of higher education during the pandemic. FSU's faculty and other instructors did remarkable work switching to remote teaching in order to bring the Spring 2020 semester to a successful close; but Fall 2020 offers new challenges, as many courses must be planned and executed entirely in remote modality. The following recommendations are intended to help faculty and other instructors continue to provide our students with learning experiences of the highest quality, while teaching remotely.

These guidelines focus on three important and sometimes overlapping considerations in course design and delivery: alignment, classroom climate, and strategic use of technology.

ALIGNMENT:

Students learn best when a course is [well-aligned](#). This means that the learning goals are clearly defined and explained; that the work students do (activities, exercises, homework, projects, exams, etc.) is properly chosen to provide students with the practice and feedback they need; and that the assessments (exams, papers, projects, and any graded work) are accurate measures of their progress toward those learning goals. This is true of all courses, regardless of the delivery modality, but it is especially critical for remote courses.

Before beginning the semester, you should be able to make the alignment between the curriculum, the course, the learning objectives, and the assessments clear to yourself and to your students:

- **Alignment with curriculum.** Where does the course fit and what purpose does it serve in the curriculum? (e.g., provides depth of knowledge in a specific area; exposes students to foundational concepts of the discipline; builds practical skills; etc.)
- **Alignment with learning objectives.** A learning objective is an outcome statement that specifies what learners should be able to demonstrate by the end of a learning unit or course. What should students be able to do because they took this course? What kind of *thinking* should they be able to do? Students are better able to accomplish these goals, and faculty are better able to evaluate students' progress, when the goals are concrete and explicit, rather than vague. In some departments, learning objectives have been previously agreed-upon by faculty and are settled issues; in others, you may have leeway to create or translate objectives. If you are determining your own objectives, you might find the examples below helpful.

Poorly-defined learning objective: Understand the thermodynamics of chemical reactions

Improved learning objective: Define enthalpy and entropy and explain how these thermodynamic quantities are combined into the concept of free energy. Calculate the standard free energy change for a chemical reaction. Explain how the free energy of a reaction can be used to determine the direction a reaction will take to spontaneously reach equilibrium.

Poorly-defined learning objective: Ideal gas law.

Improved learning objective: Use the ideal gas law to calculate the volume of gas given pressure, temperature, and composition of a gas.

Poorly-defined learning objective: Learn how social forces affect health.

Improved learning objective: Use data to draw conclusions about the relationship between inequality and health.

- **Alignment of evaluation with learning objectives.** Assessments and assignments are tools to help you and your students know how much progress they have made toward the learning goals. In other words, exams, quizzes, exercises, assignments, and activities are means of gathering evidence of students' learning. To develop useful measures and activities, it is essential to have a clear sense of what the learning needs to look like. What should students be able to do when they have mastered the concepts and skills to the level you want to see?

For example, if a goal is for students to use scientific language to describe everyday phenomena, a vocabulary quiz might not be a very accurate measure. A better-aligned measure might be a short writing assignment asking students to explain why a can of soda explodes in the freezer, or a short video of the student explaining the process aloud. Additional considerations include: How will you know where students are starting out, so that you can assess their progress? You might wish to give them a pre-test or establish a baseline.

- **Alignment of objectives and evaluation with the learning process.** Students will need appropriate practice and feedback to make progress toward the goals. What such opportunities will the course provide? How will you determine the appropriate level of skill and the type of practice needed for students to attain that level? Issues to consider include:
 - Students will need a sequence of tasks that help them to build their knowledge and skills over time. (For example, they may not know how to construct and support an arguable claim, but might first need to learn to identify a strong and arguable claim, then to assemble supporting arguments, then to develop a claim when given supporting arguments, etc.)
 - Students will make better progress when instructions are transparent. This means that it is made explicit why they are being asked to complete a particular task (i.e. how it helps to advance which learning goals); instructions on what the task involves are clear and concrete; and the criteria for evaluating success are clear.

Questions for faculty to answer:

- What are the learning goals for the course?
- What kinds of work will I ask students to do and how are they aligned with the learning goals?
- How will students get adequate practice and feedback?
- How will I determine whether, and to what extent, students are learning the concepts and skills I want them to master?

CLASSROOM CLIMATE:

Creating a learning environment that supports student learning and engagement requires careful planning. Students are struggling with the loss of structure that in-person classes provide. They miss opportunities to interact with instructors and classmates directly. Students may feel threatened or overwhelmed by external circumstances (physical and financial COVID impacts, etc.) which make it difficult for them to be attentive and engaged in their classes. Some students live in spaces that are not ideal for remote learning (e.g., others, including parents or children, may be in the room during class; students may be ashamed of their living conditions; home may be noisy and full of distractions). In other

words, when school enters private space, students may be unprepared to present themselves as appropriately focused on learning, even to the point of not being dressed appropriately – or at all!

Remote classes may be challenging for instructors, too, especially those who are new to teaching online. It can be harder to read body language online, which could make it more challenging for instructors to gauge students' reactions and adapt their communication. Remote classes and the need for flexibility and compassion during the current stressful environment can also take a toll on the instructor; added flexibility can take more time, and compassion fatigue can set in.

Because the remote format can make social and emotional connection more difficult, especially for those with less practice in the online environment, and because good learning depends on those connections, extra attention should be paid to how we create and maintain the conditions for learning in remote courses. Effective courses provide a safe and welcoming environment that fosters engagement and interaction – interactions between instructors and students, between students and course materials, and between students. Here are some things you can do to address these challenges that will help both students and instructors:

- Acknowledge the difficulties up front and ask students to partner with you in creating a safe and effective learning environment. Encourage students to find private space when participating in class, if possible.
- Respect students' privacy – Encourage them to show themselves "live," but respect their decision if they choose not to. Remember that they might not have a camera, might be extremely shy, or might be living in conditions they don't want you to see.
- Create "class rules" and couch them in the context of helpfulness: "I have found that following these rules supports a positive learning environment, so we will all agree to: turn off cell phones, address each other with respect, etc."
- Be clear about how and when you are available to students (e.g., virtual office hours) and include this information in your syllabus. Also, let students know how and when to expect responses from you. This is especially critical for those of you teaching courses with large enrollments. Here are some suggestions you may find helpful for [teaching online in large enrollment courses](#), [managing peer interactions](#) and [managing instructor/student communications](#).
- Reduce students' uncertainty about the technological tools you will be using (including remote proctoring) by providing them with opportunities to practice with them before major assignments or tests.
- Work to reduce threat in other ways by managing the tone of your communication with students and providing more information rather than less. "Humanize" yourself when you can.
- If you are teaching asynchronously, create "welcome videos" for the start of your course and for new modules. Students appreciate seeing and hearing their instructor because it helps them to connect with you. That, in turn, increases their engagement in the course and their willingness to ask questions or seek help as needed. Make sure that students also have an opportunity to "see" you by using Zoom to conduct office hours.
- Build in frequent interactive activities, including quizzes (for credit or not), polls, surveys, or any number of other interactive activities to enhance student engagement as well as opportunities for students to provide feedback about the course.
- Where feasible, allow and monitor chats on Zoom or Canvas, and use breakout rooms, to help students connect with each other and enhance student engagement in the course (see below for a more complete list of tools for increasing interaction in remote courses).

Questions for faculty to answer:

- How will I facilitate student interactions with me, the course materials, and fellow students?
- How will I monitor the “climate” in my remote classroom?
- How will I communicate with students?
- How will I help my students feel supported and engaged?

STRATEGIC USE OF TECHNOLOGY:

Before you make decisions about the specific technological tools to use in your course, first decide what sorts of learning students need to do, and what sorts of assignments and interactions are needed to accomplish your goals. As indicated in the previous section, you need to plan for three major types of interaction:

- Student – instructor interaction
- Student – material interaction
- Student – student interaction

Tools should be selected to meet the purpose they are asked to serve and should also be as simple to use as possible, to reduce student and faculty anxiety. Introducing multiple new tools beyond Canvas and Zoom at the same time is not recommended. [This document](#) identifies the types of interactions you could target to enhance learning and suggests appropriate tools to create and reinforce them.

Questions for faculty to answer:

- How and why did I select the tools?
- How did my choices serve the learning goals?
- Did I use Canvas for the syllabus, calendar, gradebook, etc.?
- How did I think about the student experience as I made these choices?
- How did I keep the students connected to each other?

CLOSING COMMENTS

We are often reminded of the need to be supportive and patient with our students during these challenging times. Let us also remember to be patient with ourselves and seek support as we tackle the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic. Teaching remotely is a frontier for many of us, but in community we can do excellent work. There are many resources available to you, and we strongly encourage you to reach out for assistance.

Resources for Faculty

[Center for Advancement of Teaching](#) (CAT)

[Office of Distance Learning](#) (ODL)

[Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP)

[Office of Faculty Development and Advancement](#) (FDA)

Resources for Students

[Office of Accessibility Services](#)

[Academic Center for Excellence](#)

[FSU Counseling Center](#)
[Department of Student Support and Transitions](#)
[Case Management](#)

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