Best Practices for Course Management

Adapted from “Online Instructor Performance Best Practices and Expectations,” Penn State World Campus by Annie Taylor
Published by The John A. Dutton e-Education Institute, the learning design unit of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University. ([https://www.e-education.psu.edu/bestpractices](https://www.e-education.psu.edu/bestpractices))

The online learning environment presents a unique set of challenges that require clear definition of instructor performance. The following Instructor Performance Expectations are considered best practices. They identify the minimum level of interaction and management needed between students and instructors to maintain a quality online learning environment.

As a course instructor, it is anticipated that you will

1. **Follow the established course start and end dates.** When students register for your course, they expect that it will start and end as stated in the Schedule of Courses. Schedule adjustments may, however, be needed to meet deadlines for graduating students and others with special circumstances.

2. **Follow the Faculty Checklist - Online or Hybrid Courses** document. This document outlines things that should be done on a daily, weekly, or semester basis.

3. **Monitor assignment submissions, and communicate and remind students of missed and/or upcoming deadlines.** You can help insure a successful learning experience by practicing proactive course management strategies.

4. **Establish and communicate to students, early in the course, a regular schedule for when you will be logging into the course.**

5. **Give prior notice to your students in the event that you will be unable to log into the course for several days or more** (e.g., during professional travel). This will help to forestall student inquiries. In cases of personal emergency, you should notify students as soon as possible if you will be away from the course.

6. **Provide feedback to student inquiries within one business day.** Because online learners must manage their time carefully, timely instructor feedback is especially important to them. If you cannot provide a detailed response within one business day, it is suggested that you respond to the students within one business day to simply let them know when a more detailed response will be provided.

7. **Provide meaningful feedback on student work using clear and concise language.** When providing feedback on student work, you have an ideal "teachable moment". Simply telling a student "good job" or "needs work" does not give them the information they need to succeed. They need (and want) more specifics. What was it that made the work good? What needs work and how can they improve specifically?
8. **Post final course grades to eLion within two business days of the course end date and/or receipt of the final assignment/exam, in accordance with University policy.**

9. **Make sure you have immediate and predictable access to the same technology that is required for students in your course.** A sample of technology requirements (these happen to be for World Campus courses) is available at: [https://courses.worldcampus.psu.edu/public/diagnostics/general.shtml](https://courses.worldcampus.psu.edu/public/diagnostics/general.shtml)  

10. **Encourage your students to complete the SRTE evaluations at the end of the course.** At the end of each semester, please send your students a note encouraging them to complete the survey and assuring them that the information will be used to improve the course. Research has shown that the biggest influence on whether a student completes an end-of-course survey is the instructor.

**Links:**
[1] https://courses.worldcampus.psu.edu/public/diagnostics/general.shtml

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Additional Penn State resources for teaching online include:

- **Managing Your Online Class**
  [https://www.e-education.psu.edu/facdev/managingyouronlineclass](https://www.e-education.psu.edu/facdev/managingyouronlineclass)

- **Online Instructor Performance Best Practices and Expectations**

- **Penn State Resources page**
  [http://psuwcfacdev.ning.com/page/penn-state-resources](http://psuwcfacdev.ning.com/page/penn-state-resources)

- **Policies, References and Teaching Resources**

- **Web and Social Media Best Practices**
  [http://agsci.psu.edu/communications/web/best-practices](http://agsci.psu.edu/communications/web/best-practices)