Preparation to Teach Online for the First Time

Your Teaching And Learning Environment...

Royal Roads University uses the Moodle learning platform for all online courses. Think of it as you would your classroom, it is the place where you will interact with learners and where learners will work with each other on team projects. It is important that you are comfortable working in the Moodle environment, one way to do this is by exploring the Faculty Orientation Course. You can try out the various tools, like the assignment dropboxes and discussion forums, refer to documentation, and watch brief movies describing how to use a tool. To best prepare yourself for online teaching work through the Orientation course. This is the environment in which your learners will be working. The orientation will help you experience the environment as a learner. If you don’t have time to get through the whole course, start with discussions and dropboxes, and return later to complete the rest. If you need further training contact CTET for either an in-person or telephone training session.
A Real-World Scenario

What? I have how many days to prepare?

Three weeks before the course start, one of the instructors has to have an emergency Appendectomy and can no longer teach the course. The school director has asked you to step in and teach the course. What are the key things you need to do to prepare yourself for teaching at the last minute?

- Learn how to use the discussion tool and dropbox tool.
- Become familiar with the course content and resources.
- Post a welcome message.

Your Course . . .

Assignments/Deliverables
Knowing when assignments are due, and what type of assignments they are (team, individual) and how each one relates to the course learning outcomes and assessment criteria will be incredibly useful information for you to have. This is something that your learners will focus on, so it is vital you are very familiar with what’s expected from your learners.

Unit Notes
Reviewing the course’s unit notes will be important to knowing:
- What your learners are learning and when.
- How unit notes relate to assignments and discussions.
- Where some of the troublesome concepts might arise.

Discussion Forums
Be aware of the following elements of discussion forums before your course starts:
- When discussions start and end.
- Topic of each discussion.
- Whether they are team or class-wide.
- Whether teams discuss first then post to classwide.
- Whether the content mentions how much involvement you, the instructor, will have in the discussions.

Course Structure
Knowing when the peak periods are, and when learners might be at their most stressed and frantic will allow you to pace yourself throughout the course, anticipate issues and concerns, and respond accordingly. Determine AND communicate with your learners when and how they can contact you, and how soon they can expect responses.

Resources
- Familiarize yourself with the course text and other resources (CD, podcasts etc).
- Make sure all online resources are linked appropriately — avoid dead links.

Your Online Presence . . .

The First Week
Here are some strategies to help you get your course off to a good start:

- Read learner profiles.
- Sign-in early but don’t be concerned if your learners are not in the course right at 9 am on the first day due to different time zones and work schedules. Do be concerned if a learner has not logged in by mid-week.
- Welcome all learners to the online course environment in an introductory posting. Ask the learners to introduce themselves as well; even if they are in a cohort and know each other, they are new to you.
- Create community online by ensuring learners ‘meet’ each other early in the course, and co-establish a positive, respectful learning environment.
- Provide clarity about the course focus, expectations for participation, and the roles and responsibilities of the instructor and the learners in contributing to an effective learning environment.
- Let learners know when you will be available (establish virtual office hours) and when you might be difficult to reach.
- Remind learners about how to use the various discussion forums in the your course, like the Learning Community, Q & A or Learner Cafe forums.

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The First Week (cont’d)

- Ensure that all content discussions are directed through the course website, but use e-mail or phone to talk to learners about personal or private issues. Provide a posting at the end of the first week to let learners know what has been accomplished and what they can expect in the following week.
- Cultivate your own personality online – use graphics, stories and anecdotes to help your class get to know you and relate to you.

Through the Rest of the Course

“Presence” is your ability to have an impact on students’ learning by being actively engaged with them online. This includes using skills such as responding in an encouraging way to postings, asking good questions, and providing timely feedback. Here are some practical tips for enhancing engagement with your learners:

- Model the kind of environment that maximizes effective learning – friendly, respectful, collaborative, and intellectually exciting.
- Encourage an inquiry-based environment by asking open ended and probing questions.
- Share stories and anecdotes that reinforce and contextualize the application of the concepts and skills being learned.
- Build on learners’ strengths wherever possible and find ways to stretch everyone’s thinking.
- Make learning relevant by appealing to learners’ life experiences, vested interests and ambitions.
- Model effective feedback – recognize that when giving written online feedback comments may appear more critical compared to when these comments are provided verbally.
- Be visible in team discussion groups as well as class-wide discussions but find ways to serve as a “guide on the side” to avoid an overly-dominating presence.
- If participation is waning or is heading in the wrong direction, tactfully steer the learners back on course.
- Make phone calls or emails to people who are not participating to ask why and to draw them back in.
- Ask learners for formative feedback – halfway through the course, poll learners on what is working, what is not, and how you might better meet their needs.

Resources


T4T

... Is a publication of the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies at Royal Roads University.

To suggest future topics, please contact:
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Your RRU Support ....

Here are some places to go if you need assistance:

- For technical questions (could not post in discussion forum; dropbox not working; cannot play or view media; issues with your account, etc):
  
  Computer Services
  (computerservices@royalroads.ca & (250) 391-2659).

- Any technical issues raised by learners should be forwarded to Computer Services.

- For instructional questions regarding your course content or adding resources and activities, contact your CTET Instructional Designer.

- If you have questions about your contract or about the learners, contact your Program Office.

- For course content questions contact the Course Lead or Program Director.