

## **Best Practices for Online Teaching: LCWA**

DE Steering Committee

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Adapted from the 2018-18 HISP Distance Education Committee and the LCWA June 2020 Best Practices documents.

### **Introduction**

The main objective of this document is to suggest best practices for faculty in LCWA in the following categories:

- A. Overview and Orientation
- B. Content, Organization, and Navigation
- C. Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Honesty
- D. Communication, Interaction, and Participation
- E. Accessibility and Usability

#### **A. Overview and Orientation**

On OAKS, create an orientation module where students can find key information for the course since day one. This orientation module should have the following elements:

**The syllabus:** Course number and title, Instructional modality (exclusively online or online with synchronous meeting), instructor contact information, office or consultation hours availability, expectations for student success and participation, student learning outcomes, course goals aligned to learning objectives, required materials, grading policy, disability statement, the Honor Code, late work policy, online attendance policy, and technical support on campus.

\*\*Please remember that the college-wide “Policy on Course Syllabi” applies to all courses taught by College of Charleston faculty: <http://policy.cofc.edu/documents/7.6.10.pdf>

**Instructions for online platforms** other than OAKS (i.e. how to enroll in the Supersite, Zoom, Voicethread, Flipgrid, Google Drive and other technology required during the course).

A warm **welcome announcement**. It helps with orientation and helps create a safe trusting environment critical to online course success. It is highly recommended that you create a welcome video so that students can put a “face to a name”. If teaching synchronously, you already will be able to introduce yourself to the classroom in the first synchronous session.

**Specific discussion forum for the students to ask general and technical questions** about the course. This will help avoid answering the same questions through individual emails.

**A forum for the students to introduce themselves** (Discussion board, Flipgrid, Voicethread, etc). In order to foster community-building and interaction, it is crucial to have an introductory forum and icebreaker in the beginning or share favorite pictures, songs, etc. If teaching synchronously and if time permits, allow time for students to introduce themselves live. If not, have students introduce themselves on the Discussion board, Flipgrid or Voicethread. Student

retention and success in your course are directly related to the interactions that happen in the course. Get your students interacting and engaged from the very beginning of the course!

Information about **the Honor Code**. Whether teaching exclusively online or online with synchronous meetings, create a Powerpoint or video about the honor code.

**Quiz about the syllabus and the honor code**. Here you can ask students key questions about the syllabus and the important policies that will drive the rest of the semester. This is a great way to make sure your students read the syllabus and remind them about academic honesty!

Include a **F.A.Q. section**. Students ask the same types of questions, especially at the beginning of course and the F.A.Q saves time.

## **B. Content, Organization, and Navigation**

The course needs to be **well organized** and **easy to navigate** from day one. You can organize your course by module, topic, or by week. Try to have a similar structure in every module (topic, or week) so students are familiar with the structure.

Each module (topic or week) should have a **description of the student learning outcomes** and goals telling students what they will learn and why.

In addition to the syllabus, include a **course calendar** with all the activities that need to be done and due dates. You may want to use different colors for different types of assignments. You may need to specify which activities or readings need to be done before others and maybe restrict access on OAKS until completed. Having a table or a checklist helps students be organized.

**Instructions** need to be very clear and organized for students to understand what they need to do. Remember you are not there in person to tell them. If teaching synchronously, you may allow some time for questions on a session (if time allows it).

Make sure the **content is delivered in more than one way** to address students with different learning styles. Use the textbook, handouts, video lectures, audio lectures, Voicethread, Powerpoint presentations, Flipgrids, YouTube videos, etc. When teaching synchronously, consider periodically changing up the content delivery during your session. For example, show a short video, conduct a Zoom poll, listen to an audio clip etc. in order to make sure students stay focused and engaged.

Make a plan to have **small group discussion**. Think how you will facilitate this practice. Discussions can be done in OAKS on the Discussion Board or using small breakout groups in Zoom during live sessions. See further details in Part D below.

Ensure that the **links outside of OAKS** are accurate, up to date, and easily found. You may want to provide access to links in different places (e.g., OAKS, documents, etc.).

If teaching a language: One of the most challenging aspects of teaching a second language online is the **interpersonal oral practice** in pairs or small groups. It is essential that there are interpersonal oral activities between classmates (you can create your own easily), and any other sites such as Talkabroad or Linguameeting with native speakers and/or international peers.

Students can also use technology such as Zoom (which has recording capabilities) to do their pair work activities. If teaching synchronously, allow time for pair or group work. If teaching asynchronously, divide students into break out rooms. It is recommended that they all have the instructions in front of them in the form of a Google doc they can all access during class time.

Use **backwards design** in course development (i.e. focus on the outcomes and build the course backwards), start developing the course early.

Know your students, make sure they know how much **time it takes to take an online course**, prepare time management tips in the syllabus. You may want to inform them of the benefits of online learning. If you are going to have synchronous sessions make sure they are planned beforehand and show at time of registration.

Have a **Plan B**. For example, if you always use Zoom, learn how to use Google Meet just in case.

Finally, to succeed in an online course, students need to be aware of all the **technology requirements**. Make a list both in the syllabus and/or inform them via email of what you expect them to have in order to fully participate in the course. Include instructions of all tools including a quick reference to OAKS and the student services at the Library. Make sure the tools can be accessed from OAKS.

### C. Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Honesty

Assessment:

Include **formative (no grade) and summative assessments** (graded). If teaching a language you may want to do that for speaking, listening, reading, writing, and/or interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes. If teaching content courses, you may also want to include both times of assessments on various components.

Give students clear ideas about what is important to learn and the **criteria or expectations** for 'good' work. Provide them with instructions, rubrics, and previous student models (if available).

Provide **detailed instructions** and tips for completing assignments.

Provide **multiple low-stakes assessments** that focus on the course and/or student learning objectives (assessment for learning).

Include **activities using apps or quizzes that provide immediate feedback** on student performance (i.e., students receive a score after completing online assignment) such as Google Forms or quizzes on OAKS.

**Provide regular feedback** about student performance in a timely manner on a variety of assignments (discussion board posts, handouts, quizzes, etc.). For online summer and/or express online courses, you may try to provide students with feedback within 24 hours. For a semester-long course, students should receive feedback within 48-72 hours in order to enhance your teacher presence. For synchronous courses, you may be able to provide general feedback during the class session.

Use **guided peer-feedback** in written drafts and oral presentations (if applicable).

Use **written reflections** that allow students to track their own learning progress.

Have **students use online checklists** on OAKS to help them keep track of their progress or provide a table with what to do with clear due dates. It is a good idea to provide dates for activities that are not graded, so that students do not wait until the last moment to complete everything.

Obtain information from **early feedback surveys** to identify any issues, adapt and/or change teaching and learning activities to meet student needs.

Make sure your **summative assessment** tools (e.g., tests, quizzes, projects, presentations, essays, etc.) are aligned with your formative assessment and instruction, and that they include detailed instructions.

Feedback:

Give **feedback in a variety of formats** (e.g. written, audio, video, etc.). Sometimes you can address the entire group in addition to individuals. Consider making “wrap up” videos that go over any class-wide issues from the previous module or recent assignments in order to alert students to any consistent and repeated issues you noticed.

Provide **timely feedback**. Try to provide students with feedback within 24 hours. For a semester-long course, provide students feedback within 48-72 hours in order to enhance your presence.

Use **apps or quizzes that provide automatic feedback**, such as Google Forms or those included in textbook online sites.

Give **specific feedback** and connect it to course content and include suggestions for ways to improve future performance.

Make sure to **first include positive feedback before constructive criticism**.

Be sure your **OAKS gradebook** reflects the grading expectations in the syllabus.

Ensure your **gradebook is accessible** to students and that the final grade is released in OAKS so that students can keep track of their current grade.

Academic Honesty:

Arrange **individual conferences/interviews** (Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, etc.) to know your students within the first week of classes for semester-long courses or within the first two days for Summer or Express courses.

As part of an introductory module, include a **section related to plagiarism**, a link to the **honor code** and some sort of assessment to ensure that students understand the implications of

plagiarism. You may want to add a ppt about the honor code and what type of help is acceptable and what is not.

You may want to consider **anti-plagiarism software** for written assignments, such as Turn-it-in.

You may want to use **proctoring tools** such as Zoom, Exami, or Respondus Lockdown browser (on OAKS) to proctor your exams.

Place **time limitations** on exams given online.

Protect **exams with passwords** (if available).

Make sure **questions on exams** are seen one at a time.

Use **alternative assessments** instead of traditional exams (e.g. projects, IPAs, conversations, presentations, etc).

#### **D. Communication, Interaction, and Participation**

Include a **variety of ways to communicate** class news, reminders and answer questions. Use the announcements section, emails, discussion boards, etc. You may want to send weekly reminders about assignments and deadlines. If teaching synchronously, you may use part of the class session for this (time permitting).

Provide **clear expectations** regarding students' participation, social and **netiquette** for online discussion and other forms of communication both synchronously and exclusively online.

Be clear about **email response times**. You may try to provide students with email responses within 24 hours for summer/intensive courses. For a semester-long course, respond within 48-72 hours in order to enhance your presence.

Let your students know that whereas, personal queries should be directed via **private email**, all content-focused, course-related and technical queries belong in the public spaces of the course site (i.e. specific discussion boards for these types of questions) so that all learners can benefit from them.

One of the most challenging tasks of teaching in an online environment is creating a **sense of community**. Do so by encouraging both faculty/student interactions and student/student interactions in every module. If possible, write a personal email once or twice during the semester. If teaching synchronously, that can be accomplished by asking students to turn on their cameras if they feel comfortable doing so. Have students attend one or two office hours on Zoom as part of their engagement/participation grade.

**Faculty/student interactions:** Use module introductions and **mini-lectures** in text, video, or audio podcasts chunked by topic of 5-10 minutes; announcements that remind, coach, suggest or inspire students; explanations and interactions with the students via email, fora, and live classroom sessions (if teaching synchronously).

**Student/student interactions:** Present opportunities for student interaction, such as pair work, group activities in the discussion board or via Google Docs, Virtual Classroom, Voicethread, Google Meet, Flipgrid, Zoom (breakout rooms), etc. Keep in mind that if students are asked to contribute to discussion boards, they may wait until the last minute before it is due, which inhibits back and forth interaction and actual conversation. Plan a way to facilitate discussion consistently over a time period so they can reply to one another rather than post a singular comment in the last minute.

Provide **opportunities to interact with members of the linguistic/cultural community** students are learning about.

## E. **Accessibility and Usability**

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and College of Charleston's Non-Discrimination Policy require faculty to provide **equal access** to educational opportunities for all students. All course content, external resources (e.g. textbook website) and assessment must be **accessible to all students**. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure access to all course content.

Utilize the College of Charleston's **Center for Disability Services** (CDS) as a resource to ensure your course complies with the College's Non-Discrimination Policy.  
<http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/for-faculty-and-staff/index.php>.

Confer to the **LCWA instructional technologist**, Mike Overholt, ([overholtm@cofc.edu](mailto:overholtm@cofc.edu)) to confirm that the course is ADA (American's with Disabilities Act) compliant. He can conduct an ADA review of the course prior to the start of the class and provide feedback to ensure accessibility.

A sound pedagogy that ensures accessibility to course content for all learners (not just those with disabilities) is **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL). UDL allows for a variety of ways in which students can engage and interact with the course content and assessment. The Journal of Educators Online-JEO explains in detail how to implement UDL in an online classroom.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068401.pdf>.

**Technology tools** that allow for seamless implementation of UDL in an online course (adapted from the reading "Creating Online Lectures" by Jessica Smith)  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068401.pdf>. Here is an abbreviated list of the tools presented:

- YouTube, Movie Captioner and VoiceThread: Free **closed captioning**. If using a different tool for a video lecture, provide a transcript that contains the written content of your lecture.
- **Screen Reading Software:** Both Windows and Mac OS have built-in technology for ensuring visually, hearing, dexterity, etc impaired learners have access to course content and assessment. See the CDS Website for more details about built-in accessibility.
- Adobe Acrobat: After converting a MS Word or Google Doc file to a PDF, tag the document using Acrobat's accessibility wizard. Tagging the document will allow **for conversion to an audio file**. Adobe's website outlines how to do this in a few, simple steps:  
<https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/pdf/pdf-accessibility-overview.html>.
- **Contrast Checker:** A contrast checker clarifies as to whether the contrast between text and backgrounds are clear and easy to see. <https://contrastchecker.com>

Other recommendations for Accessibility and Usability (Adapted from CofC's DE Readiness Course, former Instructional Designer, Amy Ostrom, UNCW and the University of Washington's IT Accessibility Guidelines.):

- When providing links, simply **provide the link address or use a very clear and obvious name**. Avoid labeling it with a generic, non-specific phrase like "click here."
- Consider using a more readable font like a **san-serif font** (e.g. Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, etc) and avoid italicizing. Underline and **bold** the font instead of italicizing.
- When setting **time limits** on anything graded including assessment, students should be informed of the time limit prior to starting the task.
- Provide a **caption with images** so that the image can be described in an audio format like a screen reader or tagged PDF.
- Be sure to **limit videos and recorded lectures to less than ten minutes** so that students are engaged. (Optimal length is 6 minutes according to Philip Guo, assistant professor of Computer Science at the University of Rochester).
- Ensure that websites or other outside resources used in the class are **accessible** to all students. If you will be using an app or a textbook companion site, it is your responsibility to confirm they are compliant. (For example, Prezi is not considered accessible, so use Power Point as is it recommended for accessibility.)
- In a visual lecture (like Powerpoint) **avoid putting too much text on one single slide** and consider providing an outline of the presentation so that students can actively take notes during the presentation.
- The University of Washington has a thorough Accessibility Checklist with links to resources that explain accessibility guidelines compliant with the law.  
<https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/checklist/>