North Seattle Community College

A Practical Guide for
- design and development of e-Learning materials
- delivery and maintenance of online and hybrid courses
- preparation and training of faculty utilizing e-Learning modalities

Working Draft -- Tuesday, April 07, 2015

The “Highlights” version

The following list of suggestions is based on the book identified below. These recommendations have been refined and supplemented by way of the experience and advice of faculty using technologies in their classrooms (physical and virtual) at North Seattle Community College. The book is highly considered and may be purchased directly from Amazon.com or from the following website: http://www.atwoodpublishing.com/books/180.htm. The cost is $19.95.


Part 1: Preparing to use online e-tools:

Essential element 1: Prepare yourself

- Assess your readiness to teach online. Complete the “Concord Consortium Worksheet for Online Readiness” which includes questions such as:
  o What benefits & advantages do you think your course will have in the online setting?
  o Do you foresee any major disadvantages to delivering your course online?
  o What skills and abilities will help you create and teach an online course?
  o Do you have the time, resources, and commitment to undertake any professional development training you may need?

- Be familiar with appropriate content and instructional style. You should be comfortable with constructivism, inquiry-based learning and alternative assessment strategies – all approaches that work well with the online learning environment.

- Do your homework. All online instructors should be knowledgeable and well trained in sound online course pedagogy. Purchase or check it out from the NeLSC library and read the book listed above.

- Complete the modules for Online Class Information Preparation

Essential element 2: Build a course outline of activities
List your course objectives. In the absence of face-to-face communication, it is vital that you write down your learning objectives for the course and refer to them as you create each activity online.

Consider what activities will help your students meet your learning objectives. Outline the general flow of material. Skip the read-and-test routine and use group activities. Include offline as well as online activities. Insist on student-to-student interaction.

Recognize that pacing in an online course is different. Build in time for students to learn the technology before starting to work. Have students practice in ungraded exercises all the technical techniques they will need to perform later for a grade.

Create a timeline for developing your course. Determine the CAS deadlines for preliminary and final approval of new online courses and incorporate these deadlines into your development timeline.

Essential element 3: Create a course schedule with clear deadlines

Choose your basic time unit. You might choose to divide your course into weeks. You might also choose to divide your course into modules with a certain time frame associated with each module (from less than a week to more than two weeks per module, perhaps variable depending on the material covered in each module).

Plan the workload. Decide how many hours per week students will be expected to spend on your class, then design and place the activities accordingly.

Plan the due dates and “check-in” dates. Regular deadlines or “check-in points” (especially for longer modules) keep students moving forward together on the same course material and ensure that students are not left on their own for too long.

Essential element 4: Plan for ongoing quality assurance

Follow recommended design and delivery “standards.” Adapt our recommended “standards” to fit with your teaching style. Included in the process is scheduled guidance by the CAS Distance Learning subcommittee after the start of the design process.

Encourage student feedback. Consider how to build in a virtual “suggestion box” via an anonymous survey and/or build an anonymous discussion room where students can reflect openly about how they feel the course is going for them.

Essential element 5: Ensure support from your administration

Look for and ask for support. Work with the folks in the Distance Learning Office and the Teaching & Learning Center because it takes a team to offer an online course. Also check out the online resources for faculty offered by the Distance Learning Office (http://webshares.northseattle.edu/elearning) and the Teaching & Learning Center (http://webshares.northseattle.edu/tlc).

Seek out the experience of colleagues. Consider opportunities to join with an experienced online teacher (or another interested colleague) during online course development and the
beginning of course delivery. Sometimes joint stipends are available for this “faculty team approach.”

**Essential element 6: Tackle the technology**

- **Educate yourself on how the courseware works.** Practice using the courseware from the perspective of the designer and a student.

- **Use only the courseware features that best suit your needs.** A software designer created the courseware you are going to use, but you may decide that you will disable certain features or use them differently than described, depending on your unique audience and the course you want to deliver to them.

**Part 2. Design your online course:**

**Essential element 7: Structure and format your course so that students can focus on the content**

- **Create web page templates.** Consider structuring your course by creating templates for your content and activity web pages. Spend time early on designing templates such that you have a “standard” appearance to lesson introductions, assignment web pages, group activities, and/or communication areas.

- **Provide for clear, intuitive navigation.** As part of your templates, build a “navigation bar” at the top, bottom or side of each of your main web pages.

- **Give good directions.** Instructions for completing assignments and technical instructions must be written clearly at a very basic level, and either be repeated frequently or be easily located and advertised whenever needed. It cannot be stressed enough how crucial this is for the success of your course.

- **Adopt consistent, sensible formatting.** Choose readable typefaces, and avoid using too many fonts (use a maximum of two or three).

- **Use multimedia to demonstrate concepts.** Use multimedia (animation, video or audio) to demonstrate concepts you normally demonstrate visually or “hands-on.”

- **Walk in your students’ shoes.** Step through the course using the student view. Complete the activities that you ask the students to complete. E.g. Use the dropbox to submit an assignment, actually take and submit an assessment, view as the student the results, instructor comments for assignments and grades.

**Essential element 8: Design a learning community that is collaborative, engaging, and inclusive**

- **First, build trust.** As the instructor, be a role model. Set the tone for a trusting environment. Start by stating your rules for netiquette on the web page which leads into the discussion room. One example of such a netiquette statement is shown on the next page.
State the community expectations. Communities function best when the expectations and outcomes for community involvement are stated up front. If student participation is mandatory, state how often and in what ways they are expected to contribute. An example of an "Expectations" statement is shown on the next page.

“Essential Element 8” is continued on the page after next...
An example of a “Netiquette” statement used in an online course:

Netiquette and Privacy

Words can mean many things and what we intend to say is not always what others hear. This is especially true of "online communication" during which other students do not have the opportunity to see your "body language" and therefore have a greater possibility of misunderstanding what you truly mean.

Please, follow these guidelines in all your online responses and discussion groups.

- **RESPECT.** We would like to suggest respectful exchanges as a basic ground rule. We feel that informational errors should be pointed out respectfully (even if stated strongly...). Disagreements that honor the viewpoints of the various contributors are productive and can lead to new learning and understanding.
- **PRIVACY.** Keep in mind not only your own privacy rights but others as well. Do not reveal any information that you deem private.
- **BE CONSIDERATE** of grammatical/spelling errors.
- **REMEMBER** that humor and satire are often misinterpreted online. Communication is more than words. So, be prepared for some misunderstanding and requests for clarification.
- **BE SUPPORTIVE.** We are all still learning. Our job is not to judge or condemn or even praise, although genuine encouragement is a necessary ingredient. We are here to provide information, to address topics in a discussion forum, and to provide assistance in helping each participant use her/his own unique learning style. Reflection generally precedes growth. So reflect upon what is said, provide sincere comments, and hopefully, we will all grow.

One good way to avoid problems is to reread your postings before sending them. Something written in haste may be misread.

Created by Val Donato, Sandra Looper, Diane Hostetler and Tom Braziunas

An example of instructor expectations for students’ participation in the discussion room:

**How to Earn Points for Discussion Participation:** Each week a new discussion topic will be posted in the main forum. Join in and post a message about the discussion topic and/or respond to someone else's message. You need to post some salient comments several times on several days in several ways (for example, by providing feedback to others' remarks) in order to earn credit. You can earn up to 10 points each week depending on your degree of participation.

**Discussion Board Clean Offs:** At the end of each of our weeks (Thursday mornings), the messages on the Discussion board will be stored to make way for the following week's conversations. If you post messages at the end of the week, they earn less credit since no one will be able to reply to them before they are archived.
The document contains bullet points and text discussing strategies for effective online course design. Here are the key points:

- **Put communication first.** Structure course activities to be communication-centered – peer-to-peer and peer-to-group, and not just student-to-teacher.
- **Go slow during the first week.** Build in extra time at the beginning of the course for orientation and for students to get to know each other. Consider an initial activity such as having students post “safe” information about themselves such as their professional and personal interests, hobbies and/or activities. A corny but potentially effective idea is to ask everyone to introduce themselves through the eyes of a pet (or their house!).
- **Encourage student feedback.** Another idea is to create a distinct discussion room as an open forum where students can reflect openly about how they feel the course is going for them. In WebCT, such a forum can be made so that postings are anonymous.

### Essential element 9: Find and use appropriate course materials and resources

- **Converting is not just transferring materials.** If you have a face-to-face course that you are now putting online, do not assume you can just transfer your activities and materials straight from your original course to an online course. Build a course that takes the most advantage of the educational possibilities of an online setting.
- **Just because a course is online, it doesn’t mean all your materials have to be.** Web-based and offline resources can reinforce one another. Students can receive materials through the online or on-campus bookstore and/or via other snail mail options.
- **Get permission.** Make sure to get permission for each piece of copyrighted material you wish to use. In your note to the copyright owners, let them know about your course (include a syllabus), when it will be offered, how many students will be in it, and how often you plan to run it. Many authors and publishers are willing to let their materials be used free of charge for educational purposes. In any case, contact the North’s e-Learning Support Center for forms and procedures for seeking permission and/or visit the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com for one-stop permissions shopping.
- **Create a set of additional resource links.** With the global reach of the Internet, you can build a terrific online bibliography of additional resources for students to pursue for their extracurricular studies.
- **Maintain your web resources.** All web resources will need to be checked each time you run the course, and you should always check links just before they go live.

### Essential element 10: Develop rich, relevant activities and assessment methods to support your learning objectives

- **Create and transform activities for use online.** The temptation is to move all the lecture notes into course web pages. This just creates a textbook online, which is not even close to being an online course, at least not the type of online course advocated here. The challenge is to organize your material into a series of interactive lessons that take advantage both of your students’ ability to connect over great distances and of the vast resources available on the Internet.
- **Use a learning cycle.** Consider using a predictable learning cycle, such as introduction, lesson, activity, and discussion. This effective pattern can make for an inviting and familiar learning environment for online learners.
Create weekly or “module” overviews. In addition to the course syllabus, create weekly (or module) overviews that summarize the topics, major activities, learning objectives, student requirements, and grading information for that section of the course. The overview web page should be the first place students go each week to get a big picture of what is expected. Consider including a check list at the bottom of this overview web page and suggest that students print out this particular web page to help them keep track of their progress.

Make documents and activities into “bite-sized” pieces. Limit what you say in any one web page. A web page that has too much information will likely be skimmed over. A simple rule is to limit web pages to not more than two or, at most, three printed pages. Each assignment web page should contain information and instructions for a single major activity only.

Tap into your students’ multiple learning styles. Present content in a variety of different formats, including web-based and offline activities. By taking advantage of different activities and formats (for example, readings, simulations, multimedia-assisted presentations laboratory exercises, essays, peer review and critiques, discussions, and offline activities), you will make the course more interesting and allow comprehension by those with different learning styles. Take advantage of opportunities for musical, visual, social, emotional and environmental learning. We have an array of easy and powerful new tools for creating narrated slideshows and screen captures, video clips, audio clips, and graphically-enhanced lessons for the Web.

State your expectations. Let students know what you expect them to have learned from each lesson. Include a clear and detailed set of expectations and/or a grading rubric with each activity.

Advertise the due date. Announce a clear due date on each assignment to provide students with the ability to plan, manage their time, and complete assignments on time.

A little bit every week. Time management is an important issue for online students, who may be unaccustomed to structuring their own time and working on projects at their own pace. To help your students beat a potential procrastination problem, avoid long-term assignments with one final due date. Instead, devise ways to check your students’ progress along the way. For example, have students complete drafts of papers (which can then be self- or peer-edited, relieving you of that responsibility). Students can gauge their preparedness for an important test by taking independent self-assessments periodically.

Beware of the “Information Superhighway!” Because students have easy access to a wealth of information on the Web, consider questions that require students to voice their opinions of an issue or synthesize information in a new way, rather than those that call for a predefined answer. The suggestions above for creating “piece-by-piece” assignments (with ongoing drafts of papers, for examples) will keep students from simply copying (i.e., plagiarizing) material off the Internet.

Handing in work. You need to build a method into the structure of your online course to confirm students have completed the work. Students can use email or an assignment drop-box (features built into Canvas, for example) to submit written assignments.

Get off the computer. Have students get offline for observational work. Different students will do better with different kinds of activities, so be sure to give them a wide range of independent work experiences. For the online learning environment, consider multimedia presentations (web pages, Power Point, etc.), field work, interviews in the local community or over the Web, web quests, and self-assessments.
Plan activities that require student collaboration. Avoid making the class one in which student simply “hand in” homework to the instructor. Plan for collaborative group activities.

Independent work doesn’t have to be private. For each independent activity you assign, consider whether it makes sense for the work students hand in to be private or to be visible to their peers. Whenever possible, allow students to share the results of their independent work with their classmates for the purpose of feedback, comparison, and collaboration.

What’s the grade? Students want to know how they are doing, especially when they don’t have the benefit of a quick approving glance from you or an informal verbal evaluation after class. Explain where, how, and when students can check their grades. The Canvas learning management system we use includes a variety of assessment and grade reporting tools which allow all students to check on their progress privately and also allow the instructor to easily manage a database of student results.

Include quizzes which account for the unsupervised setting. In some classes, you may find it useful to include typical quizzes with true/false, fill in the blank, multiple choice or short answer types of questions (all available and automatically-gradable through Canvas). Don’t rely on these too heavily however since, if not proctored, these assessments will need to be considered to be “open book.” Limit the time available to take a quiz (for example, 30 minutes to answer 15 multiple choice questions) in order to prevent students from simply tracking down answers in place of having read and understood the material. Surprisingly, our experiences show that results for simple, timed “open book” quizzes fall right in line with the degree of success students have with other forms of assessments (see next bullet).

Think differently about assessments. You might emphasize homework which is based on critical thinking of course topics rather than simple informational answers. Research projects and take-home exams are very effective, non-proctored methods of measuring student understanding, same as in on-campus classes. Group research, discussion and peer feedback will open up a variety of avenues for assessment. In interactive online environments, you will know students’ online “voices” quite well and will be able to “recognize” their own work perhaps more readily than in on-campus classrooms.

Use self-assessments. Use self-tests to replace quizzes, especially if your goal is for students to gauge for themselves their learning on a set of facts.

Incorporate private communication spaces. Whatever else you do, be sure that students have ready ways to communicate with you about concerns.

Essential element 11: Include online discussion forums and other collaborative group learning activities

Achieve a balance between individual and collaborative group learning. An online course, designed following these guidelines, allows for substantive asynchronous student interaction and the possibility of discussions and teamwork over great distances and across various cultures and points of view. Take advantage of this – and of the pedagogical power of group work – by providing a mixture of individual and group learning activities.

Communicating with classmates keeps students engaged in the material. Insist on student-to-student interaction. Use of group activities, including class-wide discussion forums, will help students experience the course content from multiple perspectives and will also help combat feelings of isolation that can creep up in the online classroom. Knowing that others are out there waiting, listening, and responding gives students one more reason to keep coming back to class.
Allow learners to collaborate with each other and to engage with the course material in a variety of ways. Group activities can be defined in many ways: from whole-class discussions, for example, to smaller team projects. The key to good online course design is to build in different types of group activities.

Ideas for online collaborative work. Consider various types of group activities such as content-related discussions, peer review and feedback of each other’s posted work, co-developed projects and homework, and discussion of reflections and observations on the activities, content and structure of the course itself. Projects could be research papers or multimedia presentations. Students might work together in “study groups” on weekly critical-thinking homework questions.

Encourage participation in discussions throughout the week. Timing is different than in a face-to-face course, so plan and allow for it. Discussions take longer because students get online at their own convenience, so it is common for a single class discussion between students in a physical classroom to become a week-long discussion in a virtual classroom.

Create topical “threads” for class-wide discussions. Each week (or module) you can have one or more discussions devoted to a single topic. Seed the discussion with a “starter thread,” in which you ask expansive questions and open the dialogue to students.

Include a minimum posting requirement in a discussion forum. Let your students know that you expect them to come to class and make their presence felt via “posting” on a minimum number of days each and every week. You might require a student to post several substantive messages at several times throughout the week, with some replies in response to the messages of peers. This helps to eliminate the habit of some students to post all their messages on the last day when the conversation is effectively over. Full credit is earned (as part of course requirements or as bonus points perhaps) only when students post in the manner you have explained ahead of time.

How big is just right for student teams doing group work? Decide on group sizes ahead of time. Consider groups slightly larger than in face-to-face work. Experience indicates that four to five students online is an ideal group size.

Will student teams work privately or publicly? Consider whether or not you will create a private or public discussion area for each team. Would students benefit from a possible “cross-pollination” of ideas between teams, or would the volume of cross-team postings perhaps overwhelm and complicate intra-team collaboration? This is a situation which might be radically different for different sets of students, and you might need to experiment and modify the original set-up as you go.

Synchronous meetings can work for small group activities. Consider using synchronous group events for accomplishing team introductions or, perhaps, for group decision making. Members of a small team can usually determine specific times when they can all meet for a quick online chat session.

Design for contingencies. Design any group activity with contingencies for students whose partners vanish into virtual space. Ensure that a project can move forward without all team members present at all times. Let team members know ahead of time what to do if one or more team members are absent (for instance, they could proceed without that student’s input and allow for ways for the student to rejoin at a later stage).
Essential element 12: Recognize that pacing in an online course is different

- **Begin slowly.** As you start putting weeks into your online course outline, build in time for students to learn the technology before starting to work. Save the more intense activities for the weeks that follow.

- **Schedule for asynchronicity.** Online activities differ in pace from their face-to-face counterparts. The times that all students choose to get online will likely not match, so the time it takes to accomplish a certain goal (especially in terms of group work) will be longer than if all students were online at the same time. But asynchronicity builds in flexibility too. Students do not need to work on only one project at one time as if they were in a classroom together. If you plan several activities for each week, students can work independently and simultaneously on a variety of projects at once. Overall, it takes approximately the same time to deliver content online as onsite; the difference is in the arrangement of multiple tasks and the pacing for completing projects.

- **Use multiple due dates and check-in points along the way.** Don’t give a longer-range assignment without having a series of checks along the way. Generally, if there is a way to procrastinate, students (and perhaps the teacher!) will do so. To ensure that students are engaged at each step, and are on-track and progressing, design smaller deliverables due more frequently.

Essential element 13: Provide equal accessibility to all students

- **Follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.** Students of all abilities have the same rights to access online courses, and the burden is on online course developers to work to ensure their web pages provide equal access to all students, regardless of their abilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines can be found at the website of The World Wide Web Consortium (**http://www.w3.org**) under “Accessibility.”

- **Let “Bobby” help you.** You don’t have to become an expert on accessibility issues. As you develop your course, gauge your progress in designing for accessibility by using “Bobby,” a service provided without charge by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). Submit the URL of any of your web pages to be checked at the “Bobby” website (**http://www.accessible.org/bobby-approved.html**) and access problems will be identified. CAST is an educational, not-for-profit organization that attempts to increase web access opportunities for all people, including those with disabilities.

Part 3. Teach your online course:

Essential element 14: Provide a comprehensive set of informational materials to prepare students for e-learning

- **Is online learning right for your students?** As students email you with interest in your course, suggest that they visit our website for useful information. North’s e-Learning Support Center offers resources on the Virtual College website (**http://www.virtualcollege.org**) to help students prepare for online course work.
Show (off) yourself to interested students! Each class description web page on the “Virtual College” website can include additional elements that can attract interested students to consider enrolling in your class. We highly encourage you to create a one-minute video of your photogenic and engaging self! Contact us (north.elearning@seattlecolleges.edu). We are available to help you record a < one minute video welcome to your class.

Describe the course in some detail. We also encourage you to create an “overview web page” for your online class for students who are interested in seeing a syllabus or more course detail before deciding on enrollment. Consider including course necessities such as prerequisites, minimum hardware requirements, needed plug-ins and the extent of audio/video-related activities with their related bandwidth/connection speed requirements. Above all, communicate your participation requirements. Make your expectations explicit.

Send out a welcoming email. A hearty welcome letter to enrolled students sets the stage for friendly, timely and helpful information. You can use this email to distribute important information to students on how to begin the course. Include the course’s URL, the protocol for each student to determine her/his user name and password (check in with North’s e-Learning Support Center at North.eLearning@seattlecolleges.edu), how to obtain technical support, and how best to contact you with course questions. Student email addresses are listed in your Instructor Briefcase. An example of a welcome email is at: http://facweb.northseattle.edu/ratkins/WelcomeEmails/WelcomeEmail_Psyc100.doc.

Contact students one way or another? The welcome letter is one way to test out the accuracy of these email addresses. For messages which are returned because of inaccurate email addresses, you might call these students to establish the first communication and to receive their correct email addresses.

Create an e-Learning Support Agreement. An important form to create online is a “Learning Support Agreement” in which students must acknowledge their acceptance of your terms (via a submit button on the form, for example) before starting the first assignment. The agreement should detail your expectations and requirements of your students (and what they can expect from you), including the minimum level of required participation, the estimated time commitment and your grading policy.

Note your own responsibilities. Consider reiterating the need for regular attendance in the discussion room. And state what students can expect from you as well. Be explicit. For example, you may state that students can expect a response within 24 hours (but not instantly!) to emails sent to you. You might state that students can expect you to participate in the discussion room as a facilitator several times during the week (or daily).

Be sure to make note of your Netiquette Explanation.

Essential element 15: Facilitate discussions in a way that keeps students on-task, promotes full participation, and encourages peer collaboration

Prep students for discussion. Students may not know how to use the discussion room so you will need to model how you want conversations to take place. Be explicit up front on expectations (review all the suggestions provided under Essential Element 11).

Let students direct the learning. Online dialogue presents unique challenges. You might use different voices in your responses to students – conceptual facilitator, personal muse or role-player. Being a “guide on the side” can cultivate dialogue that allows participants to reveal their own thoughts to themselves in new and intriguing ways.
Learn more about effective strategies for facilitating online discussion. Borrow the following excellent resource from the North’s e-Learning Support Center or purchase it from Amazon.com or from the following website: [http://www.atwoodpublishing.com/books/160.htm](http://www.atwoodpublishing.com/books/160.htm). The cost is $24.95.


Give very specific and detailed instructions when assigning group learning activities. Explain that one of the most important tasks in any group project is for all members to learn how to work together as a time. Include the who, what, where, when, why, and how in your instructions.

Group work takes time. Allow for it. Acknowledge that group work can be hard to do online.

Avoid letter writing. Language makes a difference in fostering collaboration. Avoid a tone that mimics that of a personal letter (“Thanks, Toni, for making that point.”) which may unintentionally serve to inhibit students from joining what is perceived as a “private conversation”. Include the full class (“Toni points out…”).

Essential element 16: Engage your students without over-engaging

Learn to remove yourself from the middle of the discussions. Students will learn more by your strategically-timed and-placed moderator interventions than by short comments to each post. Many of us are quite comfortable being in the middle of a discussion, whereas it may be more beneficial to be “partly invisible” while you are very actively facilitating!

Avoid getting into continuous conversations with each student. Don’t allow yourself to get involved with multiple back-and-forths with students. This situation sets up the rest of your students to just read and watch, and resembles a correspondence course.

Assure students you are reading all their posts, even if you don’t comment.

Essential element 17: Assess student work and provide student feedback

Think differently about assessments. Just as many on-campus classes have take-home exams, online courses are geared toward a similar method of assessment. You will likely need to replace multiple-choice type exams with essay/research type midterms and finals. Review all the assessment strategies presented under Essential Element 10.

Consider an internal email system. If you use an external email system (such as sending and receiving materials from student hotmail accounts), plan to acknowledge receipt and ask for acknowledgement because materials do get lost in cyber space. Some courseware management systems (like Canvas) have built-in email systems which eliminate uncertainties and provide a convenient archive of all class correspondence.

Provide prompt feedback. Regular teacher feedback is especially important online.

Consider self-assessments in place of quizzes.