Standards for good online teaching – and how to live up to it

During the COVID19 lockdown many teachers have in an impressive way acquired basic technical skills to teach online. But we have also experienced how speedy conversion to online teaching has made it difficult to maintain good relations and interactions with the students and keep up the motivation among both students and teachers. Fortunately, in the future we will have better opportunities to plan online teaching and thereby have better success in keeping up both motivation and activity level during the entire teaching courses. This check list will help you plan, implement and evaluate your online teaching, for the benefit of your students' learning.

As a starting point, you teaching is based on **SDU's underlying principle of education**, that is **Active Teaching and Learning**.

Steps in planning and carrying out good, online teaching (click on the links below to learn more):

Before the course starts

Planning the overall course: prepare according to course objectives
Communicating with students: prepare a plan for your communication
Matching expectations: develop your students' confidence with the online environment
Students prepare: support students in getting confident with the technology

During sessions

During live, online sessions: create a detailed agenda for teacher and student activities
During asynchronous, online activities

After the session

Following up: provide your students with feedback
Preparing students for digital exams - Practising oral exams: show examples and make students familiar with technology

Steps in planning and carrying out good, online teaching	Why?
Before the course starts	

## Planning the overall course 	
 	
• Start your planning by studying the learning objectives of your course. Decide what learning objectives will be dealt with in synchronous (live), online teaching (Zoom, Adobe Connect or Teams, e.g.) and which learning objectives will be dealt with asynchronously* (see explanation below).
• Use live, online teaching for dialogue with and between students, Q&A sessions, case-based teaching e.g. Provide students with active learning opportunities and keep content delivery (lecturing) to a minimum.
    o *"Focus on interaction: Invest your time more in* [interaction with students]*, and less in delivering content. The primary focus is students' individual and collaborative learning processes, but you should be active and visible as guide, observer and facilitator"* (Contact North, 2014, p. 14)
    o If relevant, include online, collaborative group work activities. Students can set up their own meeting rooms in Adobe Connect and Zoom for live discussions e.g.
• Prepare a semester plan in which you provide students with an overview of both the live and the asynchronous course activities and how these connect to the learning objectives. Use *Plans* to set up the semester plan in itslearning.
• Prepare a welcome announcement/introduction for your students in which you present the overall learning outcome of the course, the nature and purpose of the live and the asynchronous activities, assessment methods and match expectations about your and students' roles and participation. In the matching of expectations also state how and when you can be contacted and the frequency with which, you will respond to questions. Finally explain to students how to get started, i.e. where to go in itslearning as the first thing.
• Set up your course in itslearning in a logical and user-friendly manner that makes it easy for students to navigate.
(*Participate in the self-paced course 'Setting up your course in itslearning', which will give you a thorough introduction to itslearning and help you start setting up your course. You find the course under the menu tab Courses/Rum in itslearning).*
	Through this planning process you will develop a clearer vision of how your course adds value and what your students' knowledge, skills and competences will look like by the end of the course.
	
	Visioning helps clarify teachers' expectations of themselves and the students and it ensures the development of a signposted path towards the course assessment.
	
	Whilst course planning takes time, it pays off during the course for you and the students. And plans are also flexible, and as the course progresses student feedback and your own evaluations of how a lesson went will inform you of necessary or possible changes.
	
	By setting the scene at the start of the course, students will be informed and better able to plan and manage their course workload.

Communicating with students • Plan a strategy for communicating with your students online. We recommend posting a weekly announcement in which you explain to students what will happen that week and what you expect students to do. Also explain the why, what, how, where and when. • It's also a good idea to create a Q&A forum (Questions and Answers) using itslearning's discussion board tool. Ask students to post their questions in the forum and explain how often you will answer questions. This is a good way of managing your time in an online course.	Communication is vital, especially during online teaching and learning. Regular announcements will help develop the teacher-student relationship and remind students that you are there steering the way through the course.
Matching expectations • Post your welcome announcement in itslearning at the start of the course. • Carry out introductory activities with your students: set a task that helps your students get to know the asynchronous, online learning environment and each other. And during your first synchronous (live), online session, set a task that helps your students become familiar with the live, online learning environment and makes them confident to be visible on webcam and switch on their microphone to talk. • Now that you have planned the course with integrated online learning activities, take opportunities to check whether the students share your understanding of the tasks and learning outcomes. Before beginning a class activity, advise the students to take 5 minutes to write what they each understand the task to be about and what they can learn, they then share what they have written with each other and decide which interpretation/s to follow.	Teachers and students frequently experience expectation gaps and by addressing these you are all more likely to share a common understanding of processes, tasks and learning outcomes. When students are partners in the learning process, they learn how to develop as self-regulated learners.
Students prepare • Students prepare for active participation in your synchronous (live) or asynchronous learning activities. • As a preparation activity for live, online teaching, ask your students to set up their own meeting rooms in Zoom or Adobe Connect to get familiar with the system. Give them a simple group work exercise that lets them explore relevant tools.	Pre-teaching and experiential opportunities help learners get familiar with new concepts and processes. The less confident and less technically experienced students will particularly benefit from these opportunities to play, make mistakes and learn.

During sessions	
## During live, online sessions *Preparing for your live, online session*: • Create a detailed agenda in which you switch between brief introductions/presentations and activities that engage students. Remember to include an icebreaker activity to prepare students for active participation. Read more about active learning in live, online sessions. • Upload relevant materials and activities to itslearning and remember to let students know what and how to prepare. • Formulate ground rules for your live, online sessions. As part of the ground rules, decide how you want students to indicate that they have a questions or comment. *Practice*: Make sure you have the skills to use the live, online platform of your choice and its tools. *Running your live, online session* Welcome students and explain the ground rules, including how you expect students to participate actively and what your role will be. • Explain the agenda and start working your way through the items on it together with your students. • Be sure to carry out the icebreaker activity to prepare students for active participation. • Be sure to monitor the chat for questions.	When teaching face to face, you hold and steer a class by using your presence and your responsiveness to the students. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour signals changes in teaching and learning modes to the students. When teaching online, there are alternative tools and strategies and as students become more familiar with online signals they can feel more secure as online learners. All students benefit from clearly planned activities and those with neuro-diversity (dyslexia, autistic spectrum…) will particularly benefit. Clear instructions, offered in different formats including written, diagrammatic and videoed, especially support students who are studying through an additional language.

During asynchronous, online activities in e.g. itslearning	Asynchronous online activities enable and require students to time-manage, a significant skill for self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1990).
Preparing for an asynchronous activity: In asynchronous learning activities* (see explanation below), students work at their own pace and when it fits in with their other activities. This means that you will not be there to guide students live. Instead you must formulate very clear and precise instructions to students that explain exactly what they should do, why, when, how and where. If you want students to interact and comment on each other's work online, e.g., it's important to set one deadline for students' initial contributions and then a later deadline for comments. In this way, you make sure that there is something for students to comment upon. Once you have planned the asynchronous learning activity and written detailed instructions, set up the instructions and relevant tools in itslearning. *Carrying out an asynchronous activity:* Post an announcement to launch the activity. Explain the purpose, match expectations concerning roles and participation and tell students how they get started and what the deadlines are. Monitor students' work online and follow up on students who are not participating. Send announcements to remind students of upcoming deadlines, encourage students to participate and acknowledge students' contributions. You can also send announcements to get students back on track if they seem to move in a less fruitful direction. If you mean for students to interact online, do not dominate their interaction by commenting on individual students' work. Instead communicate collectively through announcements as explained above.	Maintaining a light-touch facilitating approach signals trust and encourages student autonomy, another key skill for self-regulated learning. Challenging learning activities usually require collaborative efforts between learners. Giving students opportunities to try, retry and focus on the learning process more than product encourages risk-taking and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006).

After the session	
Following up	By planning aligned online learning activities and integrating feedback, students are made aware of how the activity contributes to their learning and their performance in the course assessment.
Following up on live, online sessions: Depending on the activities of your live, online session, you might want to share the recording or any "results" produced during the session with students by uploading these to itslearning, e.g.	
Following up on collaborative, asynchronous activities: It's important to make sure that students get feedback on their work and progress. Here are some suggestions: • Skim students' contributions and comments online and post a concluding announcement that sums up students' work and highlight important points and conclusions. In courses, with more experienced learners, you can ask students to do this. It's a great learning activity. • An asynchronous learning activity can also be concluded at a live, online session where students discuss their take-aways and consider what they would like to explore further. Connecting live and asynchronous activities is a good way to create coherence and signal that asynchronous learning activities are also important learning opportunities.	Giving students opportunities to summarise, review and retell all contribute to their cognitive elaboration and deeper learning. Providing opportunities for students to give regular feedback on their learning during the course, engages them in a dialogue about learning and helps develop their understanding of what makes learning effective.
Following up on individual, asynchronous activities: • Study students' responses and identify any areas that students need to cover in more depth and plan how and where to do this.	

## Preparing students for digital exams 	
Practising oral exams
   1. Familiarise students with the online platform in a synchronous class. Use the **Waiting Room** feature if you plan to use it in the oral exam.
   2. Upload some indicative oral exam questions to itslearning and use **Screenshare** to make them accessible in the main online meeting room.
   3. Set up Breakout rooms in an online session and allocate three students to each room.
   4. One takes the examiner role, one the student role and one an observer role.
   5. Explain they need to practise some questions, changing roles each time and the observer should note queries they have about the questions and the oral exam process.
   6. If the oral exam will include annotating, sharing screens or any other Zoom features, include this in the task so the students practise it.
   7. The teacher visits some Breakout rooms, to provide advice and/or model questioning.
   8. Close Breakout rooms and return to the main meeting and discuss queries.
   9. Add queries and responses to FAQs in itslearning about the oral exam.
 	
Addressing students' anxieties about online oral exams
Ensure students have accessed the University and Faculty guidance on oral exams - provide a link on the course's itslearning site. It is especially important that the student takes responsibility for checking their online access, including sound and webcam are functioning via Zoom. Students will need to be present throughout the online oral exam, which means their webcams will need to be switched on and they will need good audio connection.
Provide time in class and a discussion board in itslearning for students to post their questions and anxieties about oral exams. Check in to the discussion board and share your responses as well as addressing issues in class time. Reassure students that your focus is to enable them to do their best. Let students know they can ask you to repeat, re-phrase a question or ask another question during the exam.
 	
See e.g. this detailed practical guidance for online oral exams – compiled by the SDU Centre for Teaching and Learning with contributions by consultants and teachers at SDU
	Integrating rubrics and assessment criteria into learning activities and peer feedback helps reduce the gap between teacher and student conceptions of assessment.
	
	Designing online learning activities which provide students with opportunities to practise the course's digital exam helps reduce student anxiety and can improve assessment performance.

* Asynchronous learning activities

Asynchronous learning activities are individual or collaborative learning activities that you can plan for your students, and that they can engage in at their own pace and when it fits in with their other activities. Therefore, this is the most flexible way of carrying out online course activities both for you and the students.

Individual, asynchronous activities could be learning logs or e-portfolios where students monitor and reflect on their learning, or students can study online resources (texts, videos etc.) and complete quizzes.

Collaborative, asynchronous learning activities take place during a couple of days or weeks. Typically, tools such as discussion board forums in itslearning, Office 365 apps or Peergrade are used. In collaborative, asynchronous activities, students can engage in peer feedback activities or subject-related discussions where they practice how to use the concepts, theories and models of the subject, put forward points of view and arguments etc. Or they can collaborate to create an encyclopaedia with definitions of concepts and terms, explanations and examples of usage. Yet another option is to ask students to share, analyse and comment on examples of the subject in use in an authentic setting.

References

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Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset How You Can Fulfil Your Potential.* London: Constable and Robinson Ltd.

Zimmerman, B.J. (1990) 'Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: an overview', *Educational Psychologist,* 25 (1), pp.3-17.