# How to Be an Effective Online Teacher

## 1. Be Present

Achieving instructor presence online means utilizing a range of different communication methods and ensuring that you check in on the students daily or hourly if needed. Discussion boards, emails, announcements, and forums are just some of the ways you can be present in your online classroom. Be sure to begin the course immediately at the start of the semester and set clear guidelines for your students about when you'll be present.  For example, announce that you will respond to them within 24-36 hours.

## 2. Set Expectations

You'll need to provide students with a very clear set of expectations before they commence their studies. These expectations should include everything from what they can expect from the instructor, as well as what will be required of them. The expectations can outline due dates for assessments, your communication frequency, how much online participation you require of them, and the conduct they will be expected to display throughout the course.

## 3. Let Students Do the Work

The aim of learning is to have students engaged in the content for as long as possible, so you need to create the opportunity for this to happen. To give students plenty of opportunity to engage with the content and each other you can ask them to find and discuss resources, grade their own assignments, and hold student-led discussions in the online forums.

## 4. Nurture A Supportive Online Community

You want students to feel as supported as possible when they're here. By using a variety of dialogue formats, you'll ensure your coursework caters to all learning types and allows students to flourish.  Encourage students to use the general forum for discussion, but also set up small groups within the class so that students can engage in feedback and support with their fellow classmates. Some students may sit back and learn from the sidelines, whereas others will benefit greatly from actively engaging in this type of communication.

## 5. Think Before You Write

When crafting responses to assignments and other evaluations, the best tone to use is a simple, clear, and polite one.

## 6.  Foster Personal Relationships with Each Student

Getting some one-on-one time with each student is just as important as effective group communication. Students studying online can sometimes feel deserted and alone in the digital classroom, so it's up to the instructor to make an effort and reach out.  Use a blend of different communication methods, including personalized responses to their discussion boards posts and emails addressed to only one student. At the start of the course, you should set out in your expectations the best communication methods, but never give out your personal email address or contact details to a student.

## 7.  Prepare posts that invite questions, discussions, and responses.

When preparing posts for your communication with your learners, always think about what you'd like their reaction to be. Do you want them to ask for more information, have a discussion, or respond with their opinions/answers? You might use a discussion if you are looking to create an open question and answer forum, encourage critical or creative thinking, or reinforce domain or procedural processes. Once you have got the students engaged, begin to raise some follow-up questions. Why do you think that? What is your reasoning? Is there an alternative strategy? Get the students thinking about why they are giving you these answers and if they might have missed something. Let the students know how you'd like them to respond, e.g., a two-part response: What you liked or agreed with, and a follow-up like what you are you still curious about, etc.

**Important: Don't post YES/NO questions.** Once you have an answer, that's the end of the discussion and we want to keep our students active in discussion. Make sure that you are actively answer email, monitor discussions, post reminders, and hold online office hours at least four times every week so that your students get the help that they need.

## 8. Make Use of Group and Individual Projects

A healthy mix of group and individual projects is the best way to ensure success with online learning. Giving students this variety of learning styles will enhance their learning capabilities and teach them the importance of both group work and individual achievements.

## 9. Use Resources That Are Readily Available

Since your students will already be engaged on their computers and use the internet to log onto the learning portal, the best resources for them are going to be online. By using an assortment of relevant and easily accessible resources such as digital publications, news sites, and online videos, students are going to be far more engaged than if they had to refer to an outdated textbook. Where possible, mobile content is ideal so don't forget to incorporate anything that can be accessed on their smartphone or mobile device.

## 10. Ask for Meaningful Feedback

Feedback provides content owners with important information they can use to increase the effectiveness of their online materials.  As a content creator, you no doubt want to make sure your online courses are as engaging, educational, and motivational as possible for learners. Proactively gathering feedback allows you to make continual improvements to your products and processes, improving the learning experience for your users and helping them to achieve their training goals.

### How To Receive Valuable Feedback In eLearning

a.  **Create anonymous surveys and questionnaires.**
    Why anonymous? Because you want your learners to be open with you and provide honest feedback; otherwise, why bother?  Don't ignore the comments and concerns of your learners; they are the ones who are experiencing your eLearning course and they are the perfect source to provide you with valuable information about what works and what doesn't.

b.  **Analyze assessments' results.**

    The results of the assessments that your learners need to complete can tell you an awful lot about their effectiveness. Is there a question that over 50% of your learners fail to answer? There might be a problem with either the wording of the question or the material you are providing, for instance, may not be adequate. Is there a challenge which more that 70% of your audience successfully complete in less time? You might need to adjust its level of difficulty. Your learners' answers to quizzes and exams are a great way to gather feedback not only about their progress, but also about the effectiveness of your eLearning course; pay attention to them and you will learn a lot about what you need to improve.

c.  **Use multiple-choice questions.**

    Multiple choice questions are a very "gentle" way to ask for feedback. They don't require a commentary, which may be annoying for the learners, and put the pressure away, provided you get them right. Consider using quick multiple questions after a challenging module or important information, when the eLearning content is still fresh in your audience's minds and make sure to randomize the positive and negative feedback answers.

d.  **Make clear that you are open to feedback.**
    You need to frequently remind your audience that you are waiting for their questions and that you are open to any critique. Communicate with each of your learners regularly and ask them for their opinion about the eLearning course. Avoid generic questions, such as whether they have enjoyed the online course.  Instead, ask specific ones, such as: What was the most useful thing you have learnt so far? Was there any information that you are very unlikely to use upon completion? What piece of knowledge was the most difficult to acquire and why? Which module was the most boring/interesting one? Did the scenarios help illustrate real world situations?
    Did images support the eLearning content or were they irrelevant and distracting?

**11. Give Feedback**

Feedback is an essential component of keeping students motivated and engaged with learning material. When students can see that you're genuinely interested in the success of your materials or program, they'll feel greater levels of engagement and motivation.  Providing feedback helps eLearners get the most out of online materials and can have a significant impact on overall learner performance outcomes.  When learning online, feedback allows the learner to assess their progress and determine potential areas of self-improvement. It promotes self-reflection, increases knowledge retention and encourages constructive discussion with instructors or other online learners.

### Ways to Provide Feedback

a. **Throughout Online Courses**
   Supplying feedback to learners throughout the duration of a course is a great way to keep users engaged and motivated. Providing performance indicators can help keeping individuals focused and on track, allowing them to see how they're progressing throughout the course.  Choose or create an online course that uses interactive content in the form of short surveys or quizzes – learners will be able to check how successful they've been in retaining the content. This can serve to motivate and reward learners when they answer correctly, as well as helping them to grasp the right answer when they answer incorrectly.

b. **Immediately After Completing an Online Course.**
   Engaging with learners directly after the completion of a course is the best time to gather accurate feedback about their learning experience, while their thoughts and experiences are still fresh and unclouded. A simple survey is a very quick and effective way to ask learners to take the time to reflect on their performance, evaluating their results in terms of their goals and expectations.

### How to Give Constructive Feedback?

a. **Correct or Incorrect, always explain why.**

   Multiple choice questions are effective, but sometimes even the most diligent learner can't resist the temptation to just guess the correct answer when they are not sure of the right option. This is why you need to always provide the proper explanation saying why each answer is correct or incorrect to help learners get a clear understanding of concepts. It may be time consuming, but it is certainly worth the effort; those learners who really want to learn will build better critical thinking skills and reinforce their knowledge.

b. **Encourage social and peer feedback.**

   Receiving feedback from someone in the same situation as you helps seeing things from a more "casual" perspective; this can be very effective in retaining information. Encourage your learners to critique each other and exchange opinions and comments about their progress by transferring online discussions to social media, where giving and receiving feedback is as natural as it gets. Consider creating a Facebook group page for online discussions or a Twitter hashtag, for instance #shareyouropinion or #whatdoyouthink, that encourages feedback exchange for shorter comments.

c. **Provide a real-world context.**
   Here is one of the most effective ways to give feedback in eLearning: Place your learners in a position that mirrors the challenges they encounter in their real life.

d. **Use motivational language**.

   Boost eLearners' interest by acknowledging their progress and preventing them from losing their confidence when they are failing. Don't simply say "This is correct" or "This is incorrect". Instead say "There you go!", "Keep it up!", and "Good job!" when they are actually doing a good job, and "Hang in there!", "Come on, you can do it!", and "Don't give up!" when they are making mistakes.

**12. Factors You need To Check for Your eLearning Course Evaluation**

a. **eLearning objectives**

First of all, you need to identify your eLearning objectives. What does your eLearning course claim to do for your learners? You have to be clear and specific about your eLearning goals. After identifying your objectives, you need to determine if your eLearning content and the learning material you have chosen serve these objectives.

b. **Level of interactivity**
Interactivity is essential for an eLearning course, because it boosts your learners' engagement and knowledge retention, both of which lead to a more effective eLearning experience.

c. **Visual impact**
It may sound superficial, but it's not; a poor visual impact disengages your learners. Examine the look and feel of your eLearning course and determine whether the images and graphics you have chosen are aesthetically appealing and, of course, suitable; you don't want unnecessary elements that will distract your audience from your content.

d. **Grammar, punctuation, and spelling**

Triple-check your eLearning course to ensure that all of your commas, periods, and exclamation marks are in their rightful place. Also, spell-check every text block, even those that are part of a video or an image, to make sure that everything is spot-on. Spelling and grammar mistakes may seem insignificant, but they can diminish the overall quality of your eLearning course by making it seem less credible and organized.

e. **Simple and straightforward navigation**

The navigation of your eLearning course should be as clear as possible.  It should include forward and backward navigation icons, a home button, and a link that will take learners to the eLearning course overview screen. Also, make sure that every button is active and that they appear in the same place on every page to avoid confusion.

f. **Language**
You will want to determine if your learners are able to completely comprehend what they are reading or listening. Is your content well written? If you are planning to appeal to a wider audience, is the jargon you are using clear for all of your learners? Are the examples you give in your stories or scenarios relevant to your learners or they exclude some of them? If you have localized the content of your eLearning course, is the translation effective? Finally, if you are using humor to make a point, is it appropriate or are there some groups in your audience that might find it offensive?

g. **Course overview/progression indicators**

Are your learners able to track their progress while participating in the eLearning course?  Have you integrated indicators that they can use to quickly and conveniently see how far they've come, what topic they've explored, and what other lessons they are going to explore in the near future? This will give them that extra boost of motivation they need to become active participants.

h. **Content stresses real world benefits and applications**
Every piece of content should tie into the real-world benefits and applications of the subject matter. If not, your learners aren't going to see the real value of completing the eLearning course and, therefore, are not likely to engage in the learning process.

i. **Effective use of feedback tools**
When learners complete a branching scenario, simulation, or assessment, are you providing them with the effective feedback they need to get the most out of their experience? Ideally, your learners should be positively reinforced every step of the way, so that they can learn from their mistakes. Ensure that you are using feedback tools and techniques to give your learners the support they need.

j. **Multimedia elements are supported by all browsers**
Learners are going to be accessing your eLearning course on a variety of different platforms and browsers. This is why it's important to verify that your multimedia elements can be viewed on a variety of browsers. Are your audio and video optimized for web viewing? Will they still be effective learning tools if they are viewed on different screen resolutions?

k. **Additional resource and reference links**
Have you included all of the reference links for any necessary content? Are there any additional resource links you'd like to offer your learners, so that they can access external videos, articles, or sites that may be beneficial.

l. **Links are active and relevant**
Double check that all of your links are active and that they will appear in a new popup window. This step, however, should also be done periodically after you've launched the eLearning course, just to be sure that the links are still active.

m. **Assessments accurately gauge learner knowledge**
Have you created quizzes, exams, and tests that are truly going to gauge learner knowledge? Have you used the right question format (multiple choice, true or false, etc.) based upon the subject matter? Do your questions offer the right amount of challenge for your learners, or are they overly difficult or simplified?

n. **Technical functions**
The technological aspect of your eLearning course is also important to be evaluated throughout. You will need to know if your learners use your eLearning course comfortably and, hopefully, intuitively. Are interface and navigation effective? What about your content's display and sound? Do all the buttons work and the text and images look as they should? Can your learners easily access the internet while taking your eLearning course if they need to? Do your links work?

o. **Time**
Another factor you need to check in order to successfully evaluate your eLearning course is the critical factor of seat time. There are several opinions on how lengthy an eLearning course should be. However, keep in mind that an effective length of time is between 15 and 30 minutes for each topic.

p. **Cost**
You will want to evaluate the cost of your eLearning course. Even if you have successfully met all the aforementioned criteria, if your eLearning course is too costly, this might be a problem.

13. **Top eLearning Design and Development Mistakes**

a. **Losing sight of the learning goals**
The learning goals should always be in the forefront of your mind. Each and every element of the eLearning course, from the content itself to the seemingly insignificant graphics you use on the final page, should serve those goals. If you lose sight of the learning goals and eLearning objectives, then you run the risk of producing a disorganized or ineffective deliverable. Have a clear idea of what the learners expects to take away from the eLearning course and what information you need to convey in order to make that happen. I highly encourage you to read the How To Write Aims and Objectives for eLearning Courses article.

b. **Developing deliverables that don't challenge the learner**

Creating an eLearning course that simply isn't difficult enough to challenge the learner is one of the biggest eLearning mistakes. Learners have to feel as though they are being pushed beyond their knowledge boundaries, as though they are actually gaining experience from the eLearning course. Otherwise, they won't be able to see the real value of participating in that eLearning course, and won't be motivated to actually learn.

c. **Not having a clearly defined idea of your target audience**

Have a keen sense of who you are creating the eLearning course. What are their interests? What is their experience level? What is level of education? Not taking the time to research your target audience will lead to courses that lack that engagement factor.

d. **Lack of effective assessment tools**

Offering information to the learner, whether it is in the form of graphics, text, or audio clips, without periodically assessing their knowledge is a major eLearning mistake. These assessments, such as exams and section quizzes, enable you to determine if they are actually absorbing the content and retaining it. It also provides them with the opportunity to summarize and recap the information, so that they can more effectively commit it to long-term memory.

e. **Creating text-heavy pages that lead to cognitive overload**

Cognitive overload occurs when a learner's mind is flooded with an abundance of information. Including text-heavy pages in your deliverable will undoubtedly lead to cognitive overload. Be concise and clear when writing content. Don't include irrelevant information and break more complex concepts down into small, more digestible, bullet points or paragraphs.

f.  **Integrating an abundance of graphics or images that distract the user**

    As is the case with text, including too many graphics or images can also hinder the learning process. Integrating a myriad of images, especially if they aren't necessarily relevant, will only serve to distract the learner. Limit the number of visual elements you use and ensure that they are high quality and on-topic.

g.  **Creating eLearning courses that are difficult to navigate**

    Navigability is key when developing an eLearning course. Even if the quality of the content is high and the graphics are spot-on, if learners cannot easily navigate through the eLearning course, they won't achieve the learning goals. They will simply click away. It's important to ensure that all links are active, and that each page can be accessed with ease.

h.  **Not paying attention to the quality of the content**
    While the visual aspects of your eLearning course should be a top priority, so should the quality of the content you are providing for learners. Learners should always feel as though every piece of content you include is of some benefit to them. Errors and poorly written content can take away from the quality of the eLearning experience make the learner doubt the value of the eLearning course, and can even diminish the credibility of your organization.

i.  **Leaving out interactive elements that create a more engaging experience**
    Videos, audio clips, real life scenarios, and background music are all perfect examples of interactive elements that can make the eLearning experience more effective. If you omit these powerful tools when you are developing your interactive eLearning strategy, you run the risk of creating eLearning courses that bore the learners, instead of making them feel like they are active participant in the learning process.

j.  **Not utilizing a variety of different learning approaches and eLearning technologies**
    It's essential to include a number of different learning approaches into your eLearning strategy. The same applies to technologies. As eLearning professionals, we have to constantly be aware of emerging technologies and tools that will help us to provide better educational experiences. Likewise, we must stay up-to-date with learning approaches, instructional design models, and theories that will give us the ability to create immersive, engaging, and informative online learning environments for all users.