

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for
advancing teaching and learning at Mona

Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you have an area that you would like us to explore in this newsletter, do not hesitate to contact us at the CETL.

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Making your online pedagogy as effective and satisfying as face-to-face teaching

Forced to teach online (due to the emergency situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic) to complete semester one and with the prospect of teaching online in semester two, the faculty of the UWI Mona must seek to facilitate quality teaching and learning experiences online. We need to make our online pedagogy as effective and satisfying as face-to-face teaching.

Is it possible to make online teaching just as rewarding as teaching face-to-face in the bricks-and-mortar/concrete blocks and steel classroom? Yes it is, but of course, in different ways; good teaching is good teaching.

Effective and satisfying online teaching

Positive, visible presence in the online classroom

In the face-to-face classroom, the teacher is a resource person, facilitating learning. The teacher explains, guides, asks questions, answer questions, illustrates concepts and engages in various other pedagogical activities designed to promote learning. Effective and satisfying teaching online calls us to do the same. Let's make our presence visible and felt in the online classroom in very positive ways.

Visible and meaningful engagement is necessary in the online classroom and this might be accomplished in several ways. Here are some tips on making your presence visible and meaningful:

- Post a weekly overview of the topic to be studied or a recap of the previous week's work or both.
- Respond promptly to questions raised in the weekly forum by your students, ideally within 24 hours, but definitely within 48 hours. Constant presence in the online classroom is good, offering suggestions and clarifying students questions. (In some cases, the

questions might have been sent to you via email. The agreed approaches to be used in posing question would have been discussed before and so should be known by all students).

- Offer suggestions to connect course material to "real world" occurrences and students' lives.
- Hold online office hours (these might be scheduled, by appointment or both. You might be able to utilise the chat tool in OurVLE for this or use Blackboard Collaborate Ultra).
- Where possible, use a short video to clarify misconceptions about some aspects of course content or assignment.
- Try to grade and return work in a timely manner.
- Have dialogue with students in the forum.

Authenticity

In the face-to-face classroom, we have an excellent opportunity to interact with our students. Through interaction, our passion for our subject is communicated. We are delighted when we see our students' faces as they come to understand difficult content. Teaching is performative and many of us are on stage. The energy transmitted from our students' fuel our own energetic actions. In many cases, we use humour and vary the pitch and intonation of our voices as we speak. Gesticulation is a big part of this performative approach. It helps us communicate and get across our point of view in meaningful ways. Therefore, in many cases, face-to-face teaching enables us to have a unique, special and yes, authentic teaching persona.

We must strive to be authentic in the online classroom. It is possible for our attempts at authenticity in teaching online to be lost in the translation. In many cases, the primary means of communication in the online classroom is the written word. We must ensure that our

written communication does not become a wall of dry and demotivating comments. We need to communicate with feeling. In the face-to-face classroom our facial expressions and those of our students are there to help. What of vocal intonation in the online classroom? Where is the performative element...are we able to stride up and down the front of the room to make our point? Is authenticity possible in the online classroom? Yes it is, but of course, it will have to be captured in a different way. Strive to capture it.

In the online classroom use your own unique voice in communicating with your students. Capture your personality and your passion in different ways. Perhaps emoticons will work for you. If they will, use them. Present your mini-lectures, instruction for course assignments, responses to student-posed questions, weekly announcements and other written communication in a way that truly reflects you.

Motivate and communicate in a warm and friendly way

Motivate, show your enthusiasm for the course and try to excite your students to learn and to care about the course and the impact of the course. Oftentimes students will feed off your motivation, enthusiasm and excitement. Students react in kind when the facilitator is dull and flat. When you constantly motivate your students to improve, exude enthusiasm and excitement about the course, teaching and student learning, that excitement and enthusiasm will be irradiated to the students.

The more you communicate with your students, the better the online learning experience is for the students. Offer to help rather than just making comments that alienate, for instance, encourage your students to do the weekly activities and participate in the forum. Instead of *“If you don’t respond to the forum questions, you might fail the course”* say instead, *“I encourage all of you to respond to the forum questions because this is one way we can learn and help others learn. Please contact me if I can help you. Thank you.”*

You might also consider posting a brief video or audio that communicates with your student in a very caring way. This might be a greeting to welcome them to the online classroom and offer reassurance that you are there to help them and that you are committed to their success.

In the face-to-face classroom, it is possible to pick up nonverbal cues. It is possible to detect those who are bored, confused or just tuned out of the class online. Unfortunately, in the online classroom, in many instances, students work alone. They sometimes become confused as they work through complex concepts etc. Of course, the lecturer is not there to ally their confusion. Therefore, it is important to anticipate isolation and confusion and plan appropriately for it in your lesson plan. Imagine that you are the student, what might be making sense and what might not make sense? As much as possible, try to envision how your students are experiencing the class. For instance: Are your instructions clear about how long the posts in the discussion forum should be? Do you include a detailed rubric for assessment tasks? These help students to get a better understanding of specific tasks in the course and your expectations. There are times that you will want to ask a trusted colleague to review your course materials as well.

Course Organization and appeal

Organize course content in ways that make it easy for students to follow. Add content that will make it visually appealing. This might be disciplinary as well as non-disciplinary. It is always good to break up long chunks of content with subheadings. Use images and these might be imbedded and where possible thumbnail videos. Make your course attractive and appealing. Model the kind of writing you want to see in the course and ensure that there is much information on how to do the assignments/tests/coursework. If possible, provide a sample of what the final assignment might look like.

Finally here is a link to a teaching online pedagogical repository that I believe you will find useful: <https://topr.online.ucf.edu/pedagogical-practice/>.

Check out our publications at

myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl/publications

which features our monthly *Teaching Tips*,
The Mona Teacher, the Assessment Handbook
and other resources.

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Contact: 876-970-0376 extn 2341, 2730