

Last-Minute Checklist For The Online Instructor

excerpted from

On-line Astronomy: Teaching Strategies and Tools

by

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A. Course Characteristics

- a. Is the virtual classroom's lay out and ambiance attractive to students?
- b. Is it relatively easy to navigate the classroom?
- c. Is essential information readily available?
- d. Is the classroom organized in a reasonable way?
- e. Are expectations, policies, and deadlines clearly indicated?
- f. Does the classroom feel like a safe place to explore, make errors, and learn?
- g. Can questions be posted at any time in an Ask-A-Question conference?

h. Have issues of plagiarism, civility, and ethics been presented?

B. Astro 101 Content

- a. Do course requirements correspond to institutional or departmental guidelines (e.g. a 3-credit class is about 90 hours of student work. This includes class time, required reading, studying, homework, projects, 2-3 exams, 1 project and 1 short activity)?
- b. Do course materials and discussions correct misconceptions, myths, and errors in a non-threatening manner?
- c. Are course materials (e.g. complexity and quantity) appropriate for undergraduate, beginning non-science majors?

C. Technical Issues

- a. Are all links working correctly and is the whole site active?
- b. In case of main server failure, do students have alternative ways to communicate with the instructor (e.g. phone, address, email, fax)?
- c. Are class materials posted visibly in the appropriate places under legible headings?
- d. Is the URL clearly visible for each link, so that if a student prints out a page, the actual web address will appear?
- e. Does the course take advantage of the ability to hyperlink to relevant sites so that students may get more in-depth explanations?
- f. Is the technical hotline phone number next to the computer?

D. Course Materials

- a. Are syllabi, course requirements and texts, assignments, announcements, study groups, etc. posted in a timely manner?
- b. Are there alternatives to content materials in case of mail delivery problems for textbooks, or in case of temporary inaccessibility to the Internet?
- c. Are there supplementary readings, resources, or activities for slower or for more talented students?
- d. Is the lesson pedagogically-sound, interesting, and appropriate for the online environment, or is it merely an uploaded lecture?
- e. Are there multiple ways of assessing the students' work and progress?

E. Interactions

- a. Do conference or discussion areas stay open to allow for ideas to be added at any time in multiple, ongoing conversations during the semester?
- b. Does the classroom establish a sense of community for the students?
- c. Does the instructor's biography & photo or introductory comments convey enough personality to the students so they can get to know him or her?
- d. Is it clear to the students that personal comments can be read by everyone in the class, and that it is more appropriate to conduct personal discussions offline?
- e. Is there a plan to handle verbose, non-participating, or trouble-making students?
- f. Has a reasonable percentage of class time been allocated for faculty-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-faculty communication?
- g. Are group projects or chances for collaborative learning included to encourage student-to-student communication?

h. Are students notified as to when they can typically expect a reply from an instructor (e.g. within 24 hours)?

i. Is there a casual "meeting area" for the students to hang out (e.g. a Virtual Student Lounge) to discuss non-course topics?