

New Online Facilitator Reference Guide



**Collice
Jamise
Governors State University
ONTL-6201**

Online Facilitator Brief Reference Guide

Table of Contents

	Page #
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Setting the Stage (Facilitator's role prior to the start of class).....	4
• Syllabus & Orientation	
• Instructors Introduction	
3. Facilitator's role after the class begins.....	6
• Ice Breakers	
• FAQ Discussion Boards	
• Assessment & Grading	
4. Challenges Facilitators may incur.....	10
5. Conclusion.....	11
6. References.....	13

Introduction

With the increase in adults returning to school, there is a rise in the need for options of convenience and flexibility for them to attend their classes. Therefore, online facilitators are in high demand. Many institutions of learning are responding to this trend and seeking out qualified instructors to facilitate courses that would offer these individuals, the opportunity to continue with their busy lifestyles all while furthering their educations. The convenience of completing assignments in your pajamas or not having to travel to campus just seems too good to be true. And while there are benefits to the online classrooms, challenges exist as well. The education, skill and knowledge of an online facilitator is very essential to the success of these courses. Just as a new bicycle comes in pieces and one must read the instructions to bring parts together to make it complete, we have created this Brief Reference guide (instruction manual) for a new online facilitator, so that the elements (pieces) of the course can be put together to ensure that the instructor has easy access to all of the foundations, fundamentals and details as it relates to the field of online facilitation. As a new online facilitator there are many things you may be unfamiliar with. This guide was created to help you to successfully facilitate and online class with as few mishaps as possible.



This guide is designed to help you through the things listed below:

- Welcome Page
- Frequently asked questions
- Ice Breakers
- Facilitator's roles prior to the start of class
- Facilitator's role when the class begins
- Assessment and grading
- Challenges facilitators may incur

Setting the Stage

Facilitator's role prior to the start of class



Proper planning is very important in preparing for your upcoming course. As a facilitator, one has to set time aside to manage elements of the course prior to the start of the class. Instructors must either be familiar with or request assistance in designing the layout of the course and be acquainted with the institution's choice of course management system(CMS). Before the students login in on the first day of the class, the facilitator should have already developed the following:

- Course Homepage
- Welcome Page
- Course Syllabus and Calendar/Schedule
- Course Orientation Page
- Discussion Topics
- Assessment and Grading
- Resources & FAQ Sections

Once the items have been implemented and tested for accuracy, relevance and is up-to-date the facilitator is ready for class to begin.

Syllabus and Orientation Page



One sure way for the instructor to set the tone for their class and to plan accordingly is to develop and implement a course syllabus. On this page, the facilitator can upload a document

within the CMS or insert the information directly onto the page. The syllabus should include very important and specific details to course information, specific assignments, activities and due dates. While many believe that listing specific dates may not be necessary to include on the syllabus, it would be up to the instructor if this is appropriate for your class. As opposed to listing specific dates, the facilitator can opt to outline only the week in which assignments should be completed.

The Syllabus has been known to be the most essential elements to include in an online course, however to supplement the information presented in the Syllabus, an online facilitator should include the Orientation page as well. One should think of the Orientation page as the resource that includes other resources and provides students with answers to all if not most of questions as it relates to the specific course. You want to make sure that you include any information that you believe would assist with the success of the students in your course. If you have a hard time figuring out what to include on your Orientation page, think of this page as similar to information that would be given out to an employee on their first day on a new job or material that would be provided to a student on their first day of class. Examples of items that a facilitator could include on the Orientation page are listed below.

- Policies and procedure for submitting assignments, quizzes & tests
- Writing and Citation Requirements
- Protocol for utilizing the email or class discussions
- Information regarding the institution's resources such as writing center, computer lab, library and tutoring.



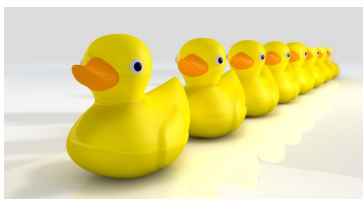
Welcome Page

The purpose of welcome page is to give the students an idea of what to expect in the class and what to expect from the instructor. This should be the first thing a student sees when they login to the course. You should keep the tone warm and inviting, but let the students know what is expected throughout the course.

You can choose to have a video welcome page or a written welcome page. Students may prefer a video welcome page because it will show your humanistic qualities. If you choose to display a written welcome page, be sure to include a picture of yourself.

Your welcome page should provide instruction on the first week's content and clear detailed instructions. Because this is the first thing the student will see, as a first time online facilitator, you will have better odds for your class to complete the first week's assignments.

Facilitator's role after the class begins



Now that the class is off to a great start and all ducks are in a row; the facilitator must find ways of making sure that the course is running smoothly and continues to do so. The best way to do this is to make certain that you are familiar with the Course Management System

(CMS) that your institution has chosen to utilize. Not only be familiar with the system from an instructor's aspect but also from a student's perspective. This will ensure that you are prepared for questions in the event that a student has a question about this particular software.

Once you are comfortable and familiar with the system, you have to make sure that you are available and present during the times specified in the syllabus. This is very important for students to know that the instructor is active in the course and is not just giving out information to read and assignments to complete. Make sure that you communicate often with your students in whichever tool you choose to incorporate in your course; such as the discussion or voice threads, collaborative sessions and or the email tool. Furthermore, as the facilitator, please be conscious of how and when you respond within these respective tools. While an online class does present its flexibility and convenience, the facilitator has to provide guidelines for communication to the students.

Collaborative sessions are a unique way to interact with your class. It brings the classroom feel to online learning. In collaborative sessions teachers and students are able to exchange ideas and get clarification on assignments. This is an easier way to communicate without having to type and read everything. When arranging a collaborative session you will need to make sure the students understand how this will affect their overall grade. You should include required attendance of the collaborative session in the syllabus, if it will be a part of their participations points throughout the semester. You should also let them know dates and times they will be required to be online ahead of time so there are no surprises.

In order for the course to be managed and flow, the instructor must have the technical skill and knowledge to facilitate it. Let's face it, technology is the key to any online course. As the facilitator, you have to be current on the ever changing technology. In order to stay up-to-date with the material it is very important to continue your education in these areas. One must keep up with the times in order to successfully manage your online courses.

Ice Breakers



Icebreakers are an important part of building community in an online class. They are strategies used at the beginning of an online class in order for students to become familiar with one another while also learning how to navigate the online course.

“Doing these icebreakers serves multiple purposes. First, they connect students to each other and lay the groundwork for an interactive and collaborative learning experience. When one of the first activities students do is to participate in icebreakers, instructors set the tone for a high level of participation and interaction. Second, regular contact with students, particularly at the start of class, shows that instructors are interested in getting to know their students and are invested in their learning, which can help increase students’ motivation to perform well in class (Mansbach, 2015).”

The links below will give you several ideas on what to use to break the ice in an online class.

<http://ce.uwex.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IceBreaker.pdf>

<https://tw.wikispaces.com/Ice-Breaker+Ideas>

<http://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2015/07/the-importance-of-icebreakers-in-online-classes/>



Frequently Asked Questions

Discussion Board

As an online facilitator you will receive an abundance of questions from students who may not understand the material. The frequently asked

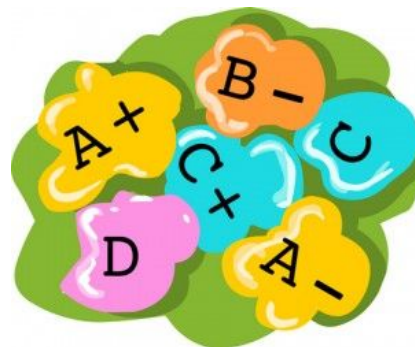
questions - discussion board is used to receive these general questions, and answer them in a forum in which other students, who may have the same questions, are able to view. Students should not ask questions about their individual grades in this forum because of privacy issues. Questions about assignments, group work, and other general questions should be asked and answered here.

Students may not initially use this forum to post general questions, because they are use to emailing the facilitator directly. If this happens, it is your responsibility to respond to their question by asking them to repost it in the frequently asked questions - discussion board, so the question can be answered for everyone to view. Soon, you will receive less email and more discussion board questions. This will cut down on answering the same question over and over again.

This board can also be used by you at the end of the class to determine what worked well and what students had trouble understanding. This will help you to update your course syllabus and information pertaining to the course which was confusing before.

Assessment & Grading

There are many differences as it relates to online teaching and face to face facilitating. However, one similarity would be how students will be assessed or graded. The essential factor in grading is for the facilitator to be knowledgeable about the method of assessments that will be used. To make certain that all students are provided with the opportunity to illustrate what they have learned, it is very important that the instructor implements a variety of assessments. This not only will add variety, but it will cater to the many different learning styles that your students will have. Providing the grading scale and methods of assessment within the syllabus will decrease grading questions in the future.



Another form of assessment/grading would be to furnish an assignment rubric. Therefore, students will have an idea of what you as the facilitator is looking for in the assignments and activities. The rubric would be used to specify the guidelines for the assignment. Please follow the link below to gain more insight on rubrics.

http://assessment.aa.ufl.edu/Data/Sites/22/media/slo/writing_effective_rubrics_guide_v2.pdf

Student assessment is a very important component in the field of teaching. Giving out letter grades or percentages does let the student know how well they are doing, but often times if the facilitator provides feedback, this is could essentially be more effective and meaningful in the long run.



Feedback allows the facilitator to provide further detail as it relates to assessment, it gives the instructor the opportunity to be more specific as to what the student did correct or incorrect and it could further impact how the student learns in future assignments.

Challenges Facilitator's May Incur

Just as with almost anything, there are benefits and challenges. As rewarding as becoming an online facilitator may be, there are most certainly challenges in the field. And just as you have overcome obstacles that you may have faced in other areas, you can accomplish this in your online course. Some challenges that online instructors may incur are listed below. Read over each item and think of ways you can conquer them by utilizing the skill, education and knowledge gained in your programs of study, experience or what you have learned from other resources. Even though these challenges may exist, you are still capable of providing a great learning experience for your students and having a successful and engaging online course.

Challenges of Online Facilitating:

- Must be current in the latest technology & be efficient utilizing the institution's Course Management System(CMS)
 - Have to deal with Non-Participation from students
 - Facilitating engaging discussion topics
 - Deal with conflict amongst students
- Determine assessments that cater to all learning styles
 - Login multiple times of day

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/dealing-your-online-teaching-challenges>

Conclusion

Just as there is a demand for educators in the traditional classroom, there is also a need for online facilitators. Working adults are making great efforts to further their education and the best fit for this to be attainable is to take online courses. The increase for the need for online education, brings about an increase for online facilitators who are skilled, educated and knowledgeable in a variety of fields. In addition to completing a rigorous online certificate program, new online facilitators need a handy resource that is readily available to assist with their first experience as an online educator. This Reference guide was developed to provide insight to new facilitators, to bring all the pieces together and to ease the nervousness and stress as you prepare for the exciting journey of online teaching. The topics discussed in this manual are for easy reference and should be supplemented by continuous education and research.



The following topics were discussed in this guide and are essential to having a successful, engaging and impactful online course.

- Facilitator's role prior to the start of class(Setting the Stage)
- Syllabus and Orientation Page
- Welcome Page

- Facilitator's role after the class begins
- Ice Breakers
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Assessment and Grading
- Challenges that may incur



Remember, that your education does not stop at this guide or after the completion of your program of study. In order to be successful and current on the technology, you have to continue your education in whichever way possible. Attend classes, conferences or read books and articles that will keep you informed about the field of online facilitation.

References

- 2015 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. (2015). Ice breaker activities. Retrieved from <http://ce.uwex.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IceBreaker.pdf>
- Las Positas College. (n.d.). Best practices in designing online courses. Retrieved from http://lpc1.clpccd.cc.ca.us/lpc/blackboard/best_practices/
- Mansbach, J. (2015, July 28). Icebreakers, online learning, active learning. Retrieved from <http://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2015/07/the-importance-of-icebreakers-in-online-classes/>
- Teaching with technology - Ice-breaker ideas. (2016). Retrieved July 21, 2016, from <https://tw.wikispaces.com/Ice-Breaker+Ideas>