

CELT Guide to Transitioning To an Online or Blended Classroom

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Transforming a traditional face-to-face course to a blended or fully online format is more than a matter of posting lectures and adding more technology--it is a transformational experience for all involved and requires time, intentionality, explicit standards, and system-wide structural supports that provide for continuous improvement (Garza Mitchell, 2009; McQuiggan, 2012).

To support SBU faculty in this effort, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) has an instructional design team experienced in designing, building, and teaching online, blended, and traditional face-to-face courses; an instructional technologist team that supports all of the technologies available on campus; and media specialists who support video production and editing.

CELT presents this guide as a step toward applying research-based strategies to grow excellent teaching and learning in the SBU online environment. This initial planning document guides faculty through a three-part process to redesign a large enrollment course for the online or blended classroom. It has four sections. 1. Before you teach online, 2. Design and build the online course site, and 3. Teaching/delivering the online course. Note that when the term “online” is used, the same strategies apply to courses that are “blended,” that is, partially online and partially face-to-face.

Section I: Before You Teach Online

Are you considering teaching online? If you’ve never designed, built, or taught an online or blended course, we recommend that you start preparing **about a year ahead**. Why? To successfully transition to online/blended, you will likely be working with a team of instructional designers, technology experts, and librarians to make sure you have course materials and

assignments that work effectively at a distance. Before you start, we recommend these steps:

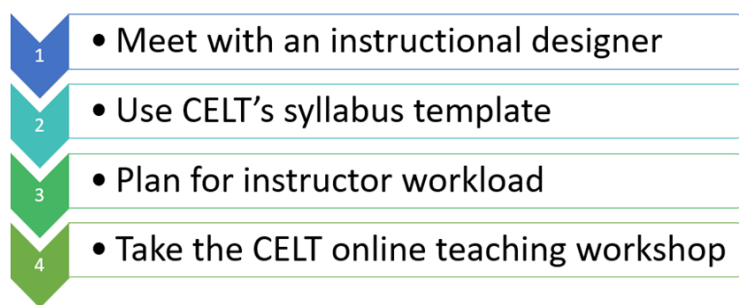
Meet with a CELT instructional designer

What is an instructional designer?

An instructional designer (ID) is a specialist in learning theory, assessment of student learning, educational psychology, and effective teaching practices. IDs are particularly skilled at incorporating all these elements into the design, creation, and facilitation of a course.

Why is it important?

While faculty are experts in their academic disciplines, instructional designers are experts in the research literature on teaching and learning. Working with an instructional designer will not only ensure the success of your online/blended course, but will help you conceptualize ways of making the online components as effective and engaging as the traditional classroom version (Dickson-Deane & Asino, 2018).



How to do it.

Contact us at celt@stonybrook.edu to request an appointment. Please attach your syllabus, so we can understand how your course works.

Use CELT's online syllabus template***What is it?***

CELT's online syllabus template provides boilerplate language for crafting an online- or blended-specific syllabus instructors can use in a proposal to their respective curriculum committee. It includes items specific to online instruction including communication methods, technical requirements and support, and detailed expectations for both students and instructors. The template also aligns with statements required by the Provost.

Why is it important?

A syllabus is integral to any course development, but even more critical for an online/blended course. Ko and Rossen (2010) emphasize three aspects of the online syllabus: the contract, the map, and the schedule. The contract discusses in explicit terms the expected roles and interactions required of both students and instructors. This includes how student participation will be quantified and qualified, how students will interact with peers, and how quickly the instructor will provide grades and feedback. The map is a blueprint of the course site and explains how students will navigate through it. The schedule is a week-by-week breakdown of topics, assignments, and deadlines.

How to do it.

Use the CELT syllabus template.

Plan for instructor workload***What is it?***

Teaching online or blended can be more time-consuming than teaching on-site, especially the first time (Kenny & Fluck, 2017; Tomei, 2006). Students will generate more written questions and comments than they would in a traditional face-to-face class and technologies may introduce unexpected glitches.

Why is it important?

Clearly, you don't want to be chained to your laptop while teaching online, so you need to create balance.

How to do it.

Some strategies that can help to balance out the workload are:

- Co-teaching/TAs. Teaching with a colleague means there are two faculty to address concerns, answer questions and brainstorm ideas regarding the class structure and students' needs.
- Planning ahead. Trying to post materials at the same time you are delivering the course will wear you out. Designing and building the course completely *ahead of time* frees you up to focus on current students' needs.
- Set aside time at least 5 days a week to respond to students and address any needs so the work of interacting with students doesn't pile up.

Take CELT's online teaching workshop***What is it?***

The Research-Based Practices of Online Teaching (RB POT) workshop is a 4-week online, asynchronous training that immerses you in the role of an online learner. It runs every semester.

Why is it important?

The workshop provides you with basic pedagogical, research-based practices for teaching online/blended, and assists you in planning instructional activities to use in your course. You can even start building your own course site during the workshop.

How to do it.

Register for RB POT. Email celt@stonybrook.edu for the current schedule and registration links. If you need technical training on tools such as Blackboard, VoiceThread, Echo 360, etc. please call or send us an email. (See our contact information in the footer.)

Section II: Design and Build the Online Course Site

Once you have taken the steps in Section I, you are ready to pair up with an instructional designer to plan and build the course site. There are several steps to ensure a well-designed course that students will find academically rigorous and engaging. The planning and building can be a

time-consuming project if you go it alone. It will help to have a team to check in with, to get feedback, and to cheer you on.

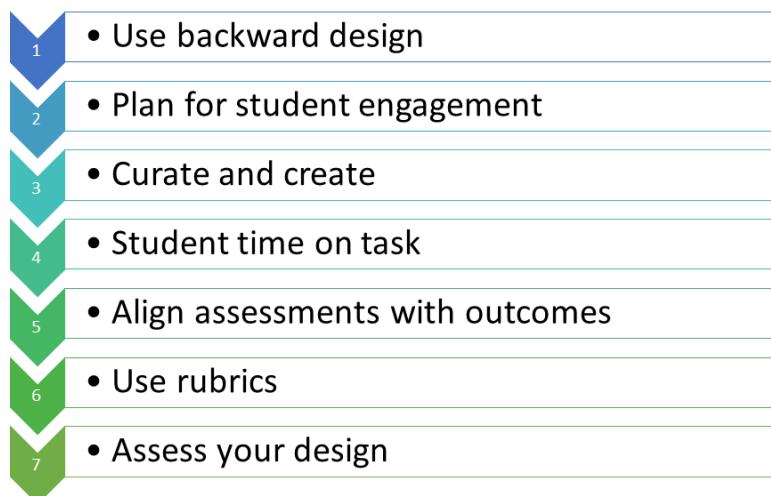
Use backward design

What is it?

Backward design is a way of ensuring student learning (Bowen, 2017; Fink, 2003). Start with the end in mind by articulating measurable learning outcomes: **What do you want your students to be able to do, know, or value as a result of having taken the course?** The best learning outcomes use concrete verbs such as define, explain, compare, and analyze. Well-crafted outcomes lead to effective alignment of activities, assignments, course materials, and assessments (Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, n.d.; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Why is it important?

Student learning is “a cognitive and social process in which students construct meaning through reflection and . . . interactions,” (Allen, 2004, p. 3). With this understanding, we assert that student learning is achieved through



activities and interaction with peers in the process of knowledge acquisition and application. Instructors must design the course with this in mind. Students learn best by doing and applying course concepts in the process.

How to do it.

Schedule an appointment with an instructional designer in CELT who will help you through the

backward design process. Once you have created learning outcomes, you can plan tasks, activities, assignments, and assessments to achieve the outcomes.

Plan for student engagement

What is it?

There are many ways to define engagement. Generally, online engagement is evident when students demonstrate a commitment not only to their own learning, but to the learning in the community they are a part of (Redmond, Heffernan, Abawi, Brown, & Henderson, 2018). In terms of design, it requires creating assignments where students regularly interact with each other as they work through the course. Likewise, the instructor should regularly give feedback, support, and encouragement.

Why is it important?

Research shows that courses without student to student engagement can leave students feeling isolated, frustrated, and confused, which impedes learning (Meyer, 2014; Moore, Fetzner, & Sener, 2009).

How to do it.

- An icebreaker activity where students introduce themselves.
- Assign students to work in small groups to create projects, reports, or web pages.
- Use discussion boards and other tools that enable students to show their grasp of course concepts.

Curate and create

What is it?

There are many ways to present content. A librarian can help you curate existing open educational resources. An instructional designer can help you create interactive learning activities that encourage students to reflect more deeply, or introduce conflicting perspectives that lend themselves to critical analysis. CELT staff can also help you create your own digital teaching materials and upload them to the course site.

Why is it important?

Students place a premium on an instructor's use of multimedia to facilitate communication and

collaboration (Chakraborty & Nafukho, 2014; Krause, Portolese, & Bonner, 2017).

How to do it.

Use multimedia to help students grasp concepts in varied ways. In addition to readings, you might have students listen to a podcast, watch a video/documentary, study an infographic, curate multimedia to illustrate a course concept, or create presentations, infographics, or tutorials. Take advantage of technologies that enable students to collect evidence and make presentations that show their learning.

Consider student time on task

What is it?

According to the [NYS Education Department](#) (n.d.), time on task is, “the total learning time spent by a student in a college course, including instructional time as well as time spent studying and completing course assignments (e.g., reading, research, writing, individual and group projects).” This holds true regardless of the delivery method or learning activities used. The state requires a total of 45 hours per credit. For a 3-credit course, this means 135 hours of time on task for the duration of the semester, or 9 hours per week in a 15-week term.

Why is it important?

Online/blended courses are more demanding of students, who must take an active, self-directed role in their own learning. The workload for students should be rigorous, but achievable.

How to do it.

This [online workload estimator from Rice University](#) may help you establish how long each activity takes. If the workload is excessive, one of CELT’s instructional designers can suggest ways to trim, without compromising course rigor (Center for Teaching Excellence, n.d.).

Assessments should align with outcomes

What is it?

Student assessments should correspond to the explicit learning outcomes of the course. Well-designed formative and summative assessments measure what students are learning. Formative assessments are low-stakes activities that are collected throughout the semester and reveal areas where students are struggling. You can

provide detailed feedback for how to improve performance. Formative assessments may or may not be graded. Summative assessments are higher-stakes activities that are graded.

Why is it important?

Both instructors and students want to know that the course is meeting their learning goals.

How to do it.

Ideally, an online/blended course has both frequent formative feedback and periodic formative feedback steadily throughout the semester. Both types can and should be used. Here are some examples:

Formative/low stakes, less formal	Summative/high stakes, formal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussions • Reflections • Muddiest point or 1-minute papers • Brainstorming • Short/low-stakes quizzes • Concept maps • Drafts of papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research papers • Final exams (multiple choice or open-ended questions) • Final projects • Portfolios • Presentations • Case studies • Field work

Use rubrics for assignments

What is it?

A rubric is an explicit set of criteria that describe a desired level of work in observable terms and that are used to evaluate learning (Allen, 2004).

Why is it important?

Rubrics are a great tool for letting students know your expectations, while alleviating your workload. Taking time before the term to articulate your expectations for the assignments and to create rubrics with clear, specific, measurable criteria can speed up grading.

How to do it.

Contact a CELT instructional designer or assessment specialist. Or, use those provided by the [AACU](#) (Association of American Colleges & Universities).

Assess your design

What is it?

We recommend the OSCQR rubric, a course-level quality rubric for reviewing and improving the instructional design and accessibility of online courses based on online best practices. It can be used before, during, and after the development of the course.

Why is it important?

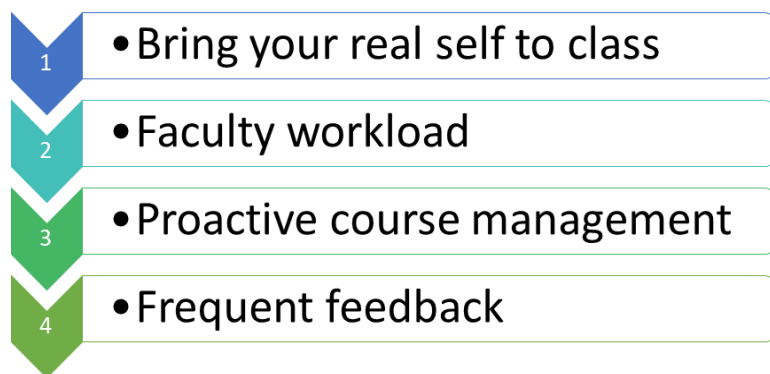
Because building and teaching successful online/blended courses is still new to many faculty, it is important to know the research-based standards of effective online design.

How to do it.

You can find the OSCQR rubric here: <https://oscqr.suny.edu/>, and CELT designers can help you interpret and use it (Online Learning Consortium, n.d.).

Section III. Teaching/Delivering the Online Course

If you followed the steps in the first two sections, you should have a fully designed and built online course. Now it's time to deliver the course. Delivery is when you're actually teaching the course and facilitating the interaction between



you and students, students to students, and between students and course content.

Even the best-designed course can fall flat if the delivery is not robust. When you teach the course you'll be modeling how to be an active learner in an online environment. It helps to show enthusiasm, interest, and encouragement to students as they move through the course. Also, remember that teaching online is an iterative

process. Each time you do it, you will improve your technique.

For first-timers, here are some strategies that will help in course delivery.

Bring your real self to class

What is it?

Faculty who are new to online teaching often worry about the challenges inherent in teaching at a distance (Trammell & LaForge, 2017; Wingo, Ivankova, & Moss, 2017). For example, without direct in-person contact with students, how can they effectively communicate the passion they have for their discipline? How will they adjust to the demands of the distance learning environment, which might seem removed and not as "real" as the in-person experience?

Why is it important?

Making your presence known is one way to let students know there is a human on the other side of the internet connection. Your teaching "presence" tells students their contributions are not only required, but a valuable component of the online learning community (Borup, West, Thomas, & Graham, 2014; Kelly, 2013; Pacansky-Brock, 2016; Swan, 2005).

How to do it.

There are many ways to bring your real self to class. Here are a few:

- Record a 3-5 minute welcome video or a short course site tour.
- Record audio or a video in which you review the syllabus.
- Post your photo, bio, and contact information on the course site.
- Hold weekly "office hours" using a video conference tool.
- Schedule 5-minute phone calls or video conferences with students during the first few weeks of class.
- Share appropriate photos that tell a little more about your interests, hobbies, travels, or publications.

Consider faculty workload

What is it?

Faculty workload is perhaps the most critical challenge when teaching an online or blended course, especially one with large enrollment.

Without face-to-face interaction, communication via electronic means is unavoidable (Conceição-Runlee, 2011). Establishing realistic expectations in the syllabus is key, but there will still be a large amount of grading, interacting, and responding.

Why is it important?

Electronic communication has raised expectations of immediate responses. For large enrollment courses, Teaching Assistants (TAs) will be necessary. It is a common misperception that the larger the online class, the fewer TAs are needed, **but the opposite is true**. The proper ratio of TAs to students is debatable, but effective practice indicates a ratio of one TA per 50 students or less (Elison-Bowers, Sand, Barlow, & Wing, 2011).

How to do it.

To keep workload manageable for faculty/ TAs:

- Minimize confusion by using explicit assignment directions and deadlines.
- Have students ask all non-personal questions in a discussion forum so answers can be crowdsourced.
- Start an FAQ list based on common questions, and direct students there.
- Run reports to quickly see which students are struggling or falling behind.
- Design a mix of student assessments that can be automatically graded in the LMS (quizzes, tests) and qualitative (essays, discussion posts, short papers, projects, group work) that may require manual grading.
- Divide the class into smaller groups that are managed by a TA.
- Train TAs to grade qualitative work, and coach them about when to escalate concerns to the instructor. CELT can assist with training your online TAs.

Proactive course management

What is it?

Despite any assumption that online/blended learning is automated, or self-paced, the literature shows that the most satisfying experiences for both students and instructors are those where the instructor walks alongside learners as they travel through the course (Stone, 2017).

Why is it important?

If students think you're not actively involved in the course, you're inviting lackluster participation at best, and academic dishonesty at worst.

How to do it.

- Push out weekly announcements to keep students on track, highlight concepts, or provide class-wide feedback.
- State explicitly in the syllabus how quickly you will respond to questions and/or provide grades and feedback. Recommendations include a 24-48 hour turnaround for questions and one week for grading.
- Make sure students have weekly or bi-weekly deliverables or deadlines.
- Provide a score and/or individualized feedback in a timely fashion.
- Keep your Grade Center up-to-date so students can see progress in real time.

Frequent feedback

What is it?

Students need feedback in order to improve their performance. Grades are a form of feedback, but students also need constructive criticism, remediation, and redirection with qualitative comments (Tracey, n.d.).

Why is it important?

Without appropriate and concrete feedback, students cannot correct misunderstandings and improve their comprehension of the content. Students want to know how they can improve and will be motivated to log in to the course site if they know that valuable feedback awaits them.

How to do it.

Providing useful feedback is a key part of online/blended classes. Strive to provide feedback that is specific and acknowledges both what is well done and what, if any, improvements can be made, and how. If you have TAs, make sure they are trained in providing descriptive, individualized feedback to students. Train TAs to use rubrics. Remember that students have feelings and generally want to improve and master the course concepts.

Section IV: Conclusion

In this white paper, we assert that teaching and learning online has the potential to be an empowering experience for both faculty and students. However, an intentional and strategic support system must be in place. Transforming a traditional face-to-face course to a blended or fully online format requires both forethought and planning. But we hope it is clear you are not alone in this process. While online teaching may not be a good fit for every instructor, nor a good fit for every student, it can be an important tool for students who have multiple obligations in addition to their studies. Online teaching and learning may also prove advantageous for academic programs looking to grow.

Teaching Online is Iterative

Lastly, teaching online is an iterative process. You will find that it gets easier over time and that each time you teach, you discover ways to improve your course design and teaching practice. The OSCQR Process is helpful in visualizing the continuous improvement system that guides instructors in reviewing and refreshing their courses on a periodic basis.

Not sure where to start? One low-stakes way to get started is to add a few online components to your traditional course. You may discover that these small steps enrich the teaching and learning experience. Whichever path you embark on, we hope you take advantage of the expertise of the CELT team to assist you. We're here to help.



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