

Faculty Gold and Online Quality Assurance at CCCOnline

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Faculty Gold and Online Quality Assurance at CCCOnline

Introduction

The basis for instructional practices at CCCOnline is the “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree Programs,” developed by the Western Cooperative of Higher Education (WCET, www.WCET.info) and adopted by all higher-education accreditation agencies in the US.

Value #1 from this Best Practices document states the following:

Education is best experienced within a community of learning where competent professionals are actively and cooperatively involved with creating, providing, and improving the instructional program.

As this quotation suggests, teaching by “competent professionals” is CCCOnline's most vital activity. Our goal is to continually revise and support best practices among our faculty. Supporting and honoring excellence in teaching remains the central focus of our organization, and this focus is fostered by our quality-assurance process, detailed below.

A best practices “community of learning” is built through the interactions between students and faculty, students and their peers, and students and the content. When participating in an online class students have two distinct forms of interaction with faculty. First, they meet the faculty through the content the faculty and the course provide. Second, they interact with the faculty as the faculty comes online (into the classroom space) to facilitate the course. Good practice thus suggests that well-designed quality guidelines will address both these areas of contact - the online materials and the “classroom” interaction - and that those guidelines will also emphasize the professional development of faculty. For purposes of faculty evaluations the CCCOnline quality-assurance process focuses primarily on student/faculty interaction.

CCCOOnline’s formal quality-assurance program was developed following interviews with faculty and students and a review of the research around quality practices in online learning. The faculty portion of the quality-assurance program includes the evaluation of the following faculty practices and uses of course tools:

- Syllabus
- Schedule
- Discussion
- Announcements
- Grade-book

In addition the faculty evaluation process includes a portion of the results from the student survey (those questions focused on faculty performance only) and faculty participation and completion of professional development workshops.

As part of a presentation on course quality for the 2005 Teaching in Community Colleges Online conference, Alice Bedard-Voorhees, Associate Dean of Academics, mapped the chapters of the CCCOnline Quality Assurance (QA) manual to the best practices in online education developed by WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, www.WICHE.edu). The map is available online at http://www.cconline.org/misc/CCCO_QAtoWICHE.htm. If you are interested

in the complete QA manual it is available for purchase to educational and business entities and at no cost to CCCOnline faculty (electronic format only).

Teaching is CCCOnline's most vital activity. Our goal is to continually revise and support our best practices such that supporting and honoring excellence in teaching remains the central focus of our organization.

Chapter 1, The Faculty Evaluation Process

The CCCOnline Quality Assurance (QA) evaluation process is as follows:

Schedule:

- Thursday before classes begin: all courses are checked for Syllabus and accurate Schedule.
- Week 3: Administrative review of first-time instructors begins. This evaluation is for informational purposes only; it will have no effect on pay rates.
- Mid-Term: Administrative review of at least one section taught by each instructor. This review covers the use of announcements, discussion and grade-book.
- Week 10-12 in the 15 week term and weeks 6-8 in the 10 week term: Student survey (course evaluation) is available to students.
- Week 16: Courses are checked for use of grade-book and final course grade.
- Monday after grades have been turned in: Faculty will receive an email with the results of the student surveys.
- The week after grades have been turned in: Program chairs review the results of the administrative reviews with faculty.

Semi-annually: Continuing instructors complete the Quality Assurance Long Form and submit it to the Chair. The current version long form is available in the e-Learning Quality Assurance Manual or from your program chair.

What the Administrative Review Covers:

- Checks for adequate use of announcements.
- Checks that the use of threaded discussions meets CCCOnline requirements for a good or best rating
- Checks for an accurate and up-to-date grade-book
- Verifies attendance at professional development workshops

Results

Faculty who receive a good (G) or best (B) in each of the reviewed areas and who fulfill the professional-development requirements are awarded matrix 2 pay. An N (needs improvement) in any area disqualifies instructors for matrix 2 pay the following semester. For information on an N in a specific area, see the appropriate rubric and talk to your program chair. Faculty who lose matrix 2 status for more than 2 consecutive semesters are asked to either complete additional professional-development workshops or sit out a term.

The current CCCOnline pay scale is available in the faculty handbook.

Chapter 2, The Syllabus

The syllabus is your first formal interaction with your online students. As such accuracy and timeliness are critical factors. Post your syllabus before the first day of class and address key course components (including the curriculum content guide). CCCOnline requires a specific syllabus format with specific policies included on a standard basis.

Each semester you should confirm that your contact information remains current and that any dates noted in the syllabus have been changed to reflect the current term. CCCOnline requires faculty to provide students with both an email address and a phone number. If you do not wish to use your home or business phone we do have voice mail available for faculty use. Please let your program chair know if you will need that service.

A sample syllabus template is included below. Several CCCOnline student policies are included in the template. Please leave those policies in your section. They reflect our response to the most common issues with students.

Syllabus Template:

ENG 121 - English Composition I

Course Syllabus

[Instructor Information](#) | [Course Information](#) | [Course Materials](#)

[Course Activities and Design](#) | [Grading and Evaluation](#) | [Course Policies](#)

Instructor Information

Instructor: Instructor Name [see [Instructor Biography](#)]

Contact Information:

Email: *(required)*

Phone: *(required)*

Instructor Accessibility: (*sample wording*) Please do not hesitate to email me with any questions you may have. I can also be reached via telephone. If you leave a message for me to call you back, please name days and times best to call you , along with a phone number.

Email will be responded to as promptly as possible, usually within 24 hours from Monday-Friday. Weekend response times will be longer.

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Course Information

Course Title: English Composition I

Course Description: Emphasizes the planning, writing, and revising of compositions, including the development of critical and logical thinking skills. This course includes a minimum of five compositions that stress analytical, evaluative, and persuasive/argumentative writing.

Credit Hours: This course carries 3 semester credits. You can normally expect to put in 8-10 hours per week on this course.

Prerequisites: Minimum assessment score in English or completion of ENG 100/090 with a C or better.

Student Outcomes:

The competencies you will demonstrate in this course are as follows:

- A. Plan, write, and revise multi-paragraph compositions that not only demonstrate competence in the following, but also function as an integrated whole: generating and exploring ideas; writing for a variety of purposes and audiences; and focusing and developing a thesis by exploring a variety of appropriate organizational strategies.
- B. Practice critical/logical thinking and reading skills - such as evaluation, analysis, synthesis, and criticism - through written assignments that stress analytical, evaluative, and persuasive/argumentative writing.
- C. Practice critical reading skills.
- D. Use accurate grammar, mechanics, and spelling and will choose diction and usage appropriate to their writing purposes and audiences.
- E. Demonstrate the ability to select and apply contemporary forms of technology to solve problems or compile information.

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Course Materials

Required Text: *Successful College Writing, 2nd edition*, with "Writing Guide" software on CD-ROM.

ISBN: 0-312-407-467

Author: McWhorter, Kathleen T.

Publisher: Bedford/St. Martins

Recommended Texts: Collegiate-Level Dictionary

Textbook

Website: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/composition/successfulwriting>

Other Resources: See the course Resources page in the left-hand "Course Menu."

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Course Activities and Design

Unit and Chapter Assignments (see course Schedule or Calendar for due dates):

Unit 1 -- Chapters 1-3
Unit 2 -- Chapters 4-8
Unit 3 -- Chapter 9
Unit 4 -- Chapter 13
Unit 5 -- Chapter 10

Participation and Interaction:

This is not a self-paced course: The weeks will go by very quickly. If you wait you will find it hard to catch up and difficult to make the due dates. But the class is very doable. You will be writing and interacting with me and with other students through your discussions and assignments, but even with all of that this course can easily be completed in the term's timeframe. Just keep with the schedule's timeline.

Participation in Discussions is Critical:

Participation in Discussions is a very important part of this class experience and cannot be made up after each week's discussion ends. Discussions are where we discuss the readings and benefit from each class member's contributions and questions. You'll find Discussion Assignments within each unit. Sometimes you will be asked to post to more than one topic in a given unit. You will be also expected to respond to your classmates' postings. You will be expected to offer helpful comments as you can. You'll want to be sure you do so to receive all points for the week. Expect to post at least 3-5 times at a detailed level in each unit. You will have a rubric to help you understand expectations for Discussions. Remember, you will receive points which will count toward your final grade for participating in the Discussions, so of course, not participating will have a negative effect on your final course grade.

Communications About Difficulties/Absences:

It is your responsibility to contact me in a timely manner if you become ill, or have scheduling or computer problems that would keep you from participating in Discussions for an entire week.

Keep a Copy of All Submissions:

Be sure to save copies of everything you send me -- email and assignments. Murphy's Law of the Computer seems to be -- what can go wrong, will. In fact, I'd advise making a back-up copy of everything on a second disk that you keep somewhere in a safe place. I'd also advise keeping a copy of everything I send you as well.

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Grading and Evaluation

Methods: Evaluation includes a combination of discussion participation, assignments, and other evaluation. Rubrics will be provided for Assignments and Discussions.

Grading Policies: Mark the unit due dates on your calendar for this class. You may submit assignments AHEAD of schedule. NO assignments are accepted past the due date.

Summary of Grading:

Assignment		Points		
Essays (4 @ 50 points each)		200		
Discussions (10 @ 20 points each)		200		
Quizzes (5 @ 20 points each)		100		
Assignments (10 @ 10 points each)		100		
Exams (4 @ 100 points each)		400		
TOTAL		1000		
Grading Scale				
A = 90-100%	B = 80-89%	C = 70-79%	D = 60-69%;	F = 59%-below

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Course Policies

Mutual Respect in CCCOnline Communications:

A very important aspect of online learning is respectful communication. The CCCOnline Learning Community is based on the value of mutually respectful communication.

Upon enrolling in programs in CCCOnline, students assume responsibility for respectful communications with other students and with course instructors, including communications which do not disrupt the online environment.

The CCCOnline Student Handbook includes a definition of disruptive communications and their consequences. Please visit the CCCOnline.org website to view the handbook.

Disruptive Communications

Definition:

- communications which disrupt the learning environment
- use of profanity and/or insulting or harassing remarks in email, discussions, chat or telephone communications.

Consequences:

A student who participates in disruptive communications forfeits the right to further class participation and is subject to removal from all CCCOnline courses for the given term without reimbursement by CCCOnline.

A student who is suspended more than once for disruptive communications forfeits the right to further enrollments at CCCOnline.

Late Work:

NO assignments are accepted past the due date.

Incomplete Grades:

The "Incomplete" grade is a temporary grade, agreed upon by the instructor, indicating that the student has a satisfactory record of work completed but, for exceptional reasons, was unable to complete the final assignments. It is designed for students who, because of documented illness or circumstances beyond their control, are unable to complete their course work within the semester but have completed a majority of the course work (**75-85% of the course assignments and tests**) in a satisfactory manner (C grade or better). The student is responsible for initiating the request for an "Incomplete" grade from the instructor.

If circumstances beyond your control at or near the end of the semester would prevent you from completing the course, consult your instructor immediately. The instructor will determine whether you have a reasonable chance of satisfactorily completing the remaining activities.

In requesting an "Incomplete" grade, the student should email the instructor the following information for evaluation:

1. Documentation of Circumstances: Evidence of completion of 75-85% of the semester course work at a C-level or higher.
2. Completion of a work plan (contract) that includes what and how assignments and tests will be submitted to complete the course.
 - a. The time period in which the work must be completed, not to exceed 15 weeks from the end of the CCCOnline semester.
 - b. The grade to be assigned if the work is not completed.
3. Both the instructor and the student must acknowledge this written email and keep a copy of the acknowledgment as documentation.

NOTE: You are encouraged to let the instructor know as soon as possible if you are having difficulties with any part of the course. However, Incomplete grades are granted at the discretion of the instructor and are not automatic. At no time will the "Incomplete" grade be used as entrance into another current or future course section for completion of the work. In the unlikely event that you and the instructor cannot reach some resolution on granting an Incomplete, please contact the [Academic Dean](#) .

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism is the act of using words and/or ideas from another person or source without acknowledgment of debt to that person or source and is a serious academic crime. Students are expected to do their own work. Students are expected to follow the Academic/Plagiarism policies of their home institutions (available in your college catalogue).

Special Services:

If you have a learning or physical disability that will require special accommodation, please notify your instructor immediately upon enrollment.

End of Semester:

You will be able to access the class for one week after the end of the semester. However, the last day to turn in any work is the last day of the semester. The extra week of access is only to check your grades.

Notice of Non-Discrimination:

CCOnline is an equal-opportunity educational institution and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Reasonable accommodations will be provided upon request for persons with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of College Support Services at 1-800-801-5040 or the Student Services office of your home college.

Disclaimer:

Other than competencies, elements of this syllabus may be subject to adjustment.

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Chapter 3, Schedule

Between 1997 and 2001 the most frequent complaint from students was that they experienced difficulty figuring out what was due when in many courses. While many courses did include that information in the course syllabus it was frequently buried in a mass of other information. In 2001 CCCOnline began asking faculty to create a separate schedule page in an easily printable format which included all of the critical due dates and assignments for the course. As a result student confusion around course requirements was practically eliminated and the burden of updating due dates each semester (which falls on faculty) was eased.

CCCOonline now requires faculty to create a course schedule that provides current term assignments and test due dates. The schedule page should be an item on the course navigation bar, clearly and easily accessible to students. CCCOnline courses cannot be self-paced; this is a requirement of our NCA accreditation. See below for an example of a schedule page.

Schedule Rubric:

Best: Schedule page is clear and easy to read; includes correct dates for the entire semester; has been updated by the Thursday before classes begin; includes “extra” information such as CCCOnline drop and withdrawal dates.

Good: Schedule page is clear and easy to read; includes correct dates for the entire semester; has been updated by the Thursday before classes begin.

Needs Improvement: Schedule page has not been completely updated by the Thursday before classes begin; dates are not all correct; due dates for some assignments are missing.

Why: to reduce or eliminate student confusion over when they are required to complete learning activities including at least reading, graded assignments, and discussions.

Sample Schedule page:

Course Schedule

The Schedule is subject to change as needed.

This page summarizes all of the graded assignments, exams, and reading assignments for the course. If you want, you can print it out and post it somewhere handy.

All assignments are described in detail on the unit assignment pages. If you have questions check there and/or send me an email.

This course is not self-paced and is not open-exit. All assignments, papers, quizzes, discussions, etc., are to be completed by no later than midnight of the due date.

NOTE: Important CCCOnline semester dates (e.g., drop/withdraw/term end) appear on the [CCCOonline calendar](#).

Unit	Week	Reading	Exam/Activities	Due Date
Unit 1	Mar 1-7	Chapter 1: Personal	Review Questions	

		Selling and the Marketing Concept	Application Exercises Video Case, page 27 Discussion # 1	Reading - 3/5 Exercises - 3/7
		Chapter 2: Personal Selling Opportunities in the Age of Information	Review Questions, Application Exercises Discussion # 2	Disc. #1 - 3/4 Disc. #2 - 3/7
Unit 2	Mar 8-14	Chapter 3: Equal Employment Opportunity - The Legal Environment	Chapter 3: Review Questions Discussion # 3 Exercise: Incident 3-2	Reading - 3/10 Rev. Questions - 3/10
		Chapter 4: Implementing Equal Employment Opportunity	Chapter 4: Review Questions Discussion # 4 Exercise: Incident 4-2 Video Case - Southwest Airlines, page 83 Exam #1 (Chapters 1-4)	Exercises - 3/12 Video Case - 3/12 Disc. #3 - 3/11 Disc. #4 - 3/14 Exam #1 – 3/14

Chapter 4, Discussion

The discussion area in each course is where the majority of the faculty-student and student-student interaction occurs throughout the semester. CCCOnline requires that faculty include discussion topics for most course units or modules. Additional information on various types of discussions and the rubric used for evaluating faculty participation in threaded discussion is available on the QA rubric used for discussions (available later in this chapter).

Student evaluations and research into adult learning make it clear that discussion is one of the most valuable online learning tools we have at our disposal. As online educators, we are also learning that sense of community can be very important to online retention. As a result we are trying to understand and share best practices in Discussion. We have some material here, but a better place to gather information on developing and managing successful discussions is in the Managing Online Discussion workshop. See the training schedule for current dates and more information.

Some nuggets gleaned from the Managing Discussion workshops:

Basics:

- The discussion space is our classroom. We can draw from our campus-based questioning techniques and use them in discussion to engage a class online. For example, when a writing instructor begins a section on Argument, the discussion might begin with the basic knowledge questions as "What is Argument according to our book? What are the key elements? Can someone give an example of an argument that didn't work? What happened to make it fizzle?"
- In introducing any discussion session, letting students know that all are welcome to answer any questions can be helpful. This encourages multiple participation, rather than the sense that only one person at a time can be involved in a given exchange with the instructor.
- Creating a welcoming (safe) and courteous environment is vital!
- Faculty Presence online is important – presence and immediacy of response are important. We should all be in the courses at least three times a week and responding to posts so students know that we are present in the course. It is a best practice to respond to new posts within 24-48 hours. It is okay not to be in courses on the weekends, though many students may be active on the weekend, particularly Sunday evenings. Interacting Friday, then again Monday, is okay.

The point of presence is much more than the hours between responses. If you were a student, would you want to be in a course room posting in a thoughtful way, yet not get any reinforcement, nor a response from the faculty to you or the class for several days?

Tips:

- Questions at the end of the book chapter can be used to initiate/forward discussion.
- Acknowledging a group of responses by naming more than one person is a good way for the instructor to economize on being very present, yet economizing on answering every post. For example, " Joe, James, and Sally together provided us with a great summary of most key points! Would anyone else like to add to their list?"
- Using follow-up questions can also be used to move the discussion forward, as well as moving students to bring forth key points from the reading. Keeping a list of focus and follow-up questions is most helpful from term to term. Groups of faculty teaching the same course have the opportunity to build a large, shared, bank of questions.

- Compliments and acknowledgments are great motivators to the class's engagement with provocative or follow-up questions.
- Students can be invited to summarize the discussion or parts of it.
- Carefully select written language, tone, voice to establish a positive, supportive, and unambiguous exchange of information in email messages: Messages must avoid direct or subtle tones of anger, impatience, rejection, unfavorable comparison, sarcasm, etc.
- Instructor handles the following through other means of communication: academic censure, academic failure, discipline, student complaints.
- Respond frequently to students. It is a best practice to respond within 24 hours to student posts.
- If students do not initiate discussion the instructor must do so.

For Writing Classes:

Writing classes often use peer-review, which is not typically instructor-led. Letting students know you are reading the reviews and that they are on the right track is good practice. Summarizing the peer session with what seem to be common observations and writing tips indicate instructor guidance and interest. Writing classes are text, text, text intensive. As faculty, you may want to consider how homework assignments and parts of journals might become discussion activity or be used in small-group discussions so that students can learn from the shared content (and your grading tasks are rolled up inside of interaction time.) Remember that responsive communication is central to online learning.

If a peer-review is one discussion thread for a unit, consider adding an instructor-thread or a Q and A. See the discussion rubric developed specifically for peer-review types of discussions for more information.

Discussion Practices provide important opportunities for the construction of knowledge among students. Faculty facilitation plays an important role in encouraging the exploration of ideas and exchanges. The rubrics which follow provide support and definition of observable practices. Additional remarks and resources can also be viewed here:

<http://www.cconline.org/FacultySC/TeachingResources/InsPractices.htm>

Threaded Discussion Quality Assurance Rubric for Instructor Facilitated Discussions

Criteria	Best	Good	Needs Improvement	Why	Coaching
Set-up	Instructor-led discussions included in more than 75% of units.	Instructor-led discussions included in 50% to 75% of units.	Instructor-led discussions in fewer than 50% of units.	Human interaction as a community is important for learner retention. The instructor's interaction matters.	Discussions in the online classroom ARE the classroom, the place where students interact with each other and with the instructor.
	1-2 Instructor-led discussion topics open at the same time.	3-4 Instructor-led discussion topics open at the same time.	More than 4 topics requiring learner response open at same time.	Too many options scatter the learner's attention and weaken the potential for community construction of knowledge.	There can be different <i>types</i> of discussions open at one time. Ex: 1 Instructor-led, 1 Question-Answer, 1 Private Journal or 1 Small Group Discussion. All these types of discussions serve different purposes.
	Discussion topics open for scheduled times.	Discussion topics open for scheduled times.	Missed dates and times.	Our courses are on semester timeline and we want to keep the class moving ahead.	Use the "Locked" feature of Discussions to open/close discussions at particular dates.

	Instructor provides initial post for each topic before the opening date of the topic.	Instructor provides initial post for each topic before the opening date of the topic.	No initial post.	The initial post welcomes and directs the learners to the given topic.	Set up the Discussion board topics before class starts. Enter initial posts for each topic before the opening date of each topic. In an open topic, use the drop down list on the right side of the screen to "Select a Topic". Choose "All" and then use the Compile command at the bottom of the screen. Save this file and make notes for future classes about the success of each discussion.
Timeliness	Instructor posts 4-5 days each week; all learner posts are responded to within 48 hours.	Instructor posts 3 days each week; the majority of learner posts are responded to within 48 hours.	Instructor input all on the same day or only a few responses.	Response to a learner's question or remark near the time it is posted is important to the teachable moment.	Drop into the course every day during the week (or even more than once a day) to respond to discussion posts, student mail, assignments etc. That way there won't be such a large amount of discussion postings to read at one time. Use a staggered schedule for discussion due dates. Perhaps the initial student comment would be due on Wednesday and remaining student comments could be due by Friday. This causes students to enter their postings over several days.
Response Rate – Introduction / Welcome thread	Instructor responds to 100% of initial learner posts in the Introduction/welcome thread.	Instructor responds to more than 90% of initial learner posts in the introduction/welcome thread.	Instructor responds to fewer than 90% of initial learner posts in the introduction/welcome thread.	Welcoming all learners makes all the difference as the learner enters the experience. You are communicating that the presence of each member of this class matters.	Respond to each student in the Introduction topic area with a personalized response. Use information from the student introduction and connect it to your experience. Example: A student comments that she lives in Charleston, SC. Instructor might respond that she has visited SC and loved old town Charleston.

Quality of Interaction	Instructor regularly interacts with all learners in a class, both on an individual and group basis.	Instructor interaction does not consistently include all class participants and their concerns.	Instructor responds to only a select few individuals; may not answer all learner questions.	The contributions of all learners matter in the class. The instructor's inclusion of both individuals and of the class helps learners benefit and build on the contributions of others.	Use the "group" posting to respond to several students with one post. For example, if three students commented about a topic, address one post to all three students. Use their name in the Subject line to capture attention. Add a redirecting or clarifying question to keep the discussion moving.
	Instructor posts acknowledging the learner's content	Instructor posts acknowledging the learner's content	No acknowledgment of learner understanding of content	The instructor's role is to motivate, encourage, guide, and challenge the learners to higher thinking /learning.	Restate the student's comments in another way acknowledging that they understood the concept/content.
	Instructor's posts re-engage the learner through additional questions at the same or higher level plus pulls the rest of the class into the discussion.	Instructor's posts re-engage the learner through additional questions at the same or higher level.	No or limited re-engagement of learners.	The course room provides the opportunity for group construction of knowledge. One-to-one address only, doesn't.	Try a "scaffolding" technique. Start the discussion with a "lower level" type question to begin building the concept and encourage students to construct a base for their knowledge structure. Begin by asking knowledge-based questions like, "what did the book have to say about X", or "How would you define this term?" Perhaps provide a definition or two to get the class discussion going. Then move to "higher level" questioning using application, analysis, evaluation or synthesis type questions.
	Instructor posts add clarifying or additional information, directing or re-directing the discussion.	Instructor posts add clarifying or additional information, directing or re-directing the discussion.	Instructor post does not either further the discussion or appropriately close it.	The "guide on the side" adds expertise, corrects misconceptions in a timely fashion.	Monitor the discussion for misinformation and direct the students to web references or text references for correct information. Bring in "guest discussants" to provide content expertise.

	Instructor posts help learners apply the content to their own lives.	Instructor sometimes helps the learners apply the content to their own lives.	No attempt.	Applying knowledge to life contexts is appealing to adults. It also “cements” the learning to a larger context.	Offer website references or other resources to expand on the topic and connect it to the students’ personal experiences and instructor’s experiences.
	Instructor or assigned learner posts the discussion summary.	Instructor announces the closure of the discussion.	No closing remarks or summary.	Providing synthesis or additional resources is valuable to the course experience, and summary skills are valuable in many contexts. Having learner s summarize provides them practice with this skill also.	Add a closing post which summarizes the important points from the discussion.

Discussion types other than Instructor-led:

CCCOOnline does not currently require the use of discussion types other than Instructor-led. However, their use is encouraged if appropriate for your subject matter.

The following guidelines apply if you choose to use Small Group Discussions or Peer-to-Peer Discussions

Criteria	Best	Good	Needs Improvement	Why	Coaching
Set-up	Opening statement from faculty sets expectations for both learners and faculty.	Opening statement from faculty sets expectations for both learners and faculty.	No opening remarks or attempt to set expectations.	Providing learners with opening directions moves them to the task at hand more quickly. Instructions also provide the big picture for the process which learners are about to enter.	Prepare students for the small group by providing explicit instructions and expectations. Set the goal for the small group experience. Provide ample time to accomplish that goal. Identify the grading rubric for the small group project. Provide time for the students to debrief their experience. Participate in the Building Community Workshop for more information on small groups.
	Faculty periodically enters discussion to confirm or re-direct the group process.	Faculty periodically enters discussion to confirm or re-direct the group process.	No evidence faculty is present in the discussion.	If participants are off course, re-direction does matter.	Instructor does not need to dominate these types of discussions. Enter a comment or two to show presence and redirect or encourage students as necessary.
	Faculty provides summary or closing remarks.	Faculty announces the closure of the discussion.	No closing remarks or summary.	This is another teachable moment, especially if common errors are surfacing, ones which could be corrected before a final project is turned in, for example.	Post a summary of main points and redirect to further activity. i.e. note common strengths or errors, resources.

The following guidelines apply to Question and Answer discussions:

Criteria	Best	Good	Needs Improvement	Why	Coaching
Set-up	Opening statement from faculty sets expectations for both learners and faculty.	Opening statement from faculty sets expectations for both learners and faculty.	No opening remarks or attempt to set expectations.	Providing learners with opening directions moves them to the task at hand more quickly. Instructions also provide the big picture for the process which learners are about to enter.	Post initial question or direction so that students understand the purpose of this discussion and how to enter their questions. Encourage students to respond to classmates' questions.
	Instructor acknowledges every learner post and provides additional resources in their own response.	Instructor acknowledges every learner post.	Instructor responds to less than 100% of questions.	To invite questions only to ignore them is frustrating for learners.	Answer every question or acknowledge the correct answer if already posted by another student.

What Does it Mean to Get an *N* in Discussions? Understanding your own Evaluation.

Managing discussion is a complex skill. We strongly recommend the Managing Discussions Workshop if you have received an *N* (needs improvement) in discussions. To clarify potential problem areas the *N* in discussions has been further defined as N1 through N6.

- **N1:** The Instructor has little or no participation, is not visible or involved in the class discussion. Instructor does not communicate with or respond to most students.
- **N2:** Very little Instructor response. Instructor does not respond to the required minimum number of students.
- **N3:** Instructor does not facilitate T.D. The majority of instructor response contains only short complementary acknowledgements i.e. good job, keep up the good work etc. Instructor response does not use examples, follow-up questions, or an exchange of information.
- **N4:** Majority of TD discussion is student to student. Instructor responses are not timely (24-72 hrs), and/or are input after majority of discussion is complete.
- **N5:** TD is not included in a minimum of 50% of course units
- **N6:** TD remains locked although student schedule indicates prior date

N1 and N2 refer to the quantity of instructor responses. The CCCOnline standard is that faculty respond to a minimum of 75% of student posts. While some responses may be group responses, students do need to know that the faculty is reading and responding to their work.

N3 refers to the quality of the student engagement in the discussion. Managing discussions so that students are engaged and re-engaged in the subject is a critical teaching skill in the online environment. To this end it is discussed in more detail below.

N4 refers to the timeliness of faculty responses.

N5 refers to the CCCOnline requirement that discussions be included in most (more than 50%) units.

N6 is a housekeeping reference. Discussions must be unlocked for students to participate. It is good practice to lock discussions after the time period for posting has ended. This allows students to return to the discussion and re-read posts, but does not allow them to continue to post in that area.

Avoiding an N-3: Developing Course Discussions through Re-engagement Techniques

Re-engagement is a skill most faculty use almost automatically in classroom settings, as we strive to help our students deepen and extend their thinking in face-to-face discussions by asking probing questions and by calling on students to encourage participation. Similarly, we also need to engage and then re-engage distance-education students in stimulating and thought-provoking discussions online - discussions designed to move them toward higher-level thinking or toward thinking about the subject at hand in new ways. The online environment, however, makes this more difficult because we have no cues except our words to guide students in the directions we hope they will go - no tone-of-voice, no facial expressions, no gestures, etc. In fact, it's possible that our very intervention in discussions may cause them to cease (rather than continue and deepen) when students interpret our remarks as having signaled an end to the conversation. This effect of course is not what we want to convey, so how do we avoid it?

What follows are some how-to's for preventing such inadvertent *ending* of students' discussion remarks, and instead *extending* them - i.e., *re-engaging* students in a deepening conversation. As a side note, these techniques also help you avoid an N3 rating on your quality-assurance evaluation. An N3 rating on your QA means the evaluator didn't see enough re-engagement posts used in your discussions.

Why use re-engagement techniques?

Re-engagement as a questioning technique moves learners to further develop remarks they've made, or it invites others to add to the construction of knowledge. It can generate a higher level of thinking and dialogue, and can promote class synergy.

What's the opposite of Re-engagement?

Statements that close the discussion.

For example, a summary of the discussion that ends without telling students where to go next. Discussion summaries are wonderful tools for helping students organize material, but why not end with a further question or directions to the next discussion?

Negative statements to students can also be both good and bad. Sometimes the solution to a student's incorrect answer might be to ask the rest of the class why this answer is not correct. Tone becomes critical to generating more interaction, however. If students feel put down, they will not continue to respond.

Too many "good job" sorts of statements without the addition of further directional information - additional questions, deeper questions, etc. - can also close off a discussion prematurely.

What techniques can we use to re-engage learners in discussion and build a deeper level of knowledge?

Learners do want to know they are on the right track in a discussion. Yet, when the faculty says "that's great," one effect is that the contribution/possibility of further exploration ends at that point (Barker & Barker, n.d.).

Here are some examples:

Instructor post without re-engagement:

Joe and Sally, you're right on the money!

Instructor's post using Re-engagement:

Joe and Sally brought up two very solid points about X-class, what other points would you add?

OR

Joe, that is a good point. Now if you were to consider X also, what additional issues would you need to consider? (It's easy to use the word "but" after the compliment - try not to as that can be off-putting to students.)

OR

I'd like to invite you all to come up with some ways to implement Sally's solution to the problem.

ALSO

That's correct, Sally-class members, if you have solved the problem a different way, we'd love to see your solution.

Cotton (1998) recommends asking students to draw from lower-level information or infer from sources an answer to a higher-level question that the faculty asks. She also suggests "redirection and probing," drawing on the pertinent elements in the student posts. Holding back on effusive praise while using positive remarks can push the thinking level, interactions, and level of knowledge construction upward.

Additional Resources

Barker, C., & Barker, D. (n.d.) Managing online discussions. Retrieved June 4, 2004, from <http://faculty.spokanefalls.edu/discussions/manage.htm#discussions>

Cotton, K. (1998, May). Close-Up #5: Classroom questioning.

Retrieved June 4, 2004, from <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu5.html>

Chapter 5 Announcements

An announcement is one-way interaction between faculty and the class; it's not something you are using to generate a lot of interactivity. Any message you would share at the beginning of a land-based class, for example, is a candidate for an online announcement. Thus, announcements contain pertinent, up-to-date information that you want students to notice (different from a date that was in the schedule and that you did put in the course calendar before Day 1.)

Initial announcements often provide a welcome to the students, possibly give you a place to introduce yourself, and suggest to students what they should do first on their first visit to the class. Regular announcements every week or two remind students of due dates or highlight something of interest to the class.

A faculty member may post announcements in many different ways. CCCOnline is currently evaluating the various possible locations indicated below. A best practice might be to post announcements in more than one location in your course. However, we prefer that you choose just one or two of the methods and use them consistently. Repetition is important to learning, but don't get carried away. Try to remain consistent throughout the semester. You are invited to select the methods that serve you best in your class.

Let students know where the announcements will be posted and that they should check for announcements whenever they enter the course.

Where to post Announcements:

On the course Home Page: You may post new announcements directly to the home page. You may need to archive older announcements so that students can still access them later in the course.

On the Calendar: The calendar automatically highlights a new posting when a student first logs in, so it shouldn't be overlooked.

Email: You may choose to send the class an email announcement using WebCT's internal email. This method is convenient and the presence of new messages is automatically indicated when a student logs in.

Discussion: You may use an "Announcements" topic in the Discussions tool. This tool also automatically indicates a new posting when a student first logs in.

Rubric:

Best: Faculty uses a class announcement at least once a week to

- highlight important material for the course.
- note relevant current events
- remind students of due dates
- kick-start discussions on a topic

Announcements are placed in one location on a consistent basis, making it easy for students to find and ready them.

Past announcements are archived so that students can access them through-out the semester.

Good: Faculty uses announcements as discussed above but archive of past announcements is difficult to find or does not exist.

Needs Improvement: Announcements are rarely used or placed in various areas around the course making them difficult to locate. Archives of past announcements are difficult to find or do not exist.

Why:

Because announcements typically include information which the student needs to successfully master the course content they should be simple for the student to locate and review.

Chapter 6 Grade-book:

Your class grade-book is another area for regular communication with students. A grade-book which is regularly updated with students' gradable assignments clearly identifies students' academic progress. All students know that you have received their work and they in turn have received at least one of your comments on that work. CCCOnline requires that faculty post the final grade for the course in the course grade-book.

Rubric:

Best:

- Grade-book is updated regularly to reflect current assignments
- Columns are organized in a straight-forward manner
- A final-grade column is included
- Comments on student work is included in the grade-book

Good:

- Grade-book is somewhat current, but may be missing some grades
- All appropriate columns are included, but organization is lacking

Needs Improvement:

- No final-grade column is included
- Grades are not updated until the end of the term

Why:

Grade-books have an important role in your communication with students throughout the semester. A grade posted in the grade-book lets students know that you have received their assignments and have commented on it. Prompt posting of grades on your part can alleviate many communication issues, the most common being "I didn't realize you hadn't received my paper."

Grade-books also have an important role in resolving any student issues once the course has been completed. The administrative arm of CCCOnline maintains copies of grade-books for use when a student requests a grade review after the end of the term. The grade-book becomes substantiation for either a change of grade because it was posted incorrectly (grades are still sometimes hand-entered at the colleges) or leaving the grade as posted.

Chapter 7 Student Survey

Each semester every student in every course is asked to complete a student survey. A complete copy of the survey is included below. For purposes of faculty evaluation only the results of questions 1-10 are used. Results from the remaining questions inform changes to the course content and to other CCCOnline operations.

The QA process requires that faculty receive a 3.5 or better in each section (on a 5-point scale). Sections where only a small percentage of the students returned the survey or extremely small sections are looked at on a case-by-case basis. The QA coordinator also reviews sections where an exemplary instructor suddenly receives unexpectedly low results from the survey.

The student survey is delivered to students via a pop-up window whenever they log into WebCT from the 10th to the 12th week of the semester or until they complete the survey for each sections in which they are enrolled.

Student Survey

Scale:

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Somewhat Agree
- C. No Opinion/Neutral
- d. Somewhat Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

The following 10 questions refer to the teaching skills of your instructor:

1. The instructor encourages us to actively participate in the class through email, announcements, and discussion.
2. The instructor challenges us to think/analyze/evaluate.
3. The instructor clearly explains what we can expect to learn in the course.
4. The instructor's explanations, guidance, and feedback helped me to understand the course concepts (main ideas).
5. The instructor relates the subject matter to other courses, life, and/or employment.
6. The instructor is enthusiastic about the subject matter.
7. The instructor is knowledgeable about the subject matter.
8. The instructor actively invites the students to ask questions and/or express opinions.
9. The instructor responds to discussion posts and emails in a timely manner. (Generally less than 48 hours.)
10. The instructor grades and returns materials in a timely manner. (Generally less than 72 hours.)

The following 5 questions refer to the online materials available for this course:

11. The syllabus was clear and easy to understand.
12. The schedule page is well organized and accurately lists all course assignments and due dates.
13. The Start Here page adequately explained how to begin the course.
14. I find the online course materials to be complete and well organized.

15. I had few technical difficulties with the course software (e.g. turning in assignments, taking exams, participating in discussions.)

The following 2 short answer questions refer to this specific course:

16. What really worked in this course? (Please write your comments in the space provided)
17. How would you improve this course? (Please type your answers in the space provided.)

The last two questions refer to your reasons for taking this online course through CCCOnline:

18. Please indicate your reasons for taking this course (check all that apply):
- required course for major
 - transfer course
 - personal interest in subject
 - work related
 - wanted an online course
 - wanted specific instructor
 - required pre-req course
 - works well with my schedule
 - like the convenience
 - like the flexibility
 - cost
 - course not offered on campus
19. Why did you choose to take this course from CCCOnline as opposed to another online option? (short answer)

Chapter 8, Professional Development

Ongoing professional development for faculty and staff is a critical step in fulfilling our desire to remain a strong and vibrant online program focused on bringing exemplary online education to students. A best practice in this area is for all online faculty to experience the life of an online student at least once before teaching online. Faculty workshops are also an important aspect of the community of CCCOnline.

Individuals interested in teaching for CCCOnline are required to attend the hybrid “Introduction to WebCT” workshop before teaching. Once faculty have begun teaching for CCCOnline they are required to complete the “WebCT Survival” workshop in their first year of teaching. Continuing faculty are asked to attend at least one additional professional development workshop per year. This requirement can be fulfilled through attendance at any of the online and face-to-face workshops offered throughout the year or attendance at the annual faculty conference held each fall.

Faculty can also fulfill this requirement by facilitating a professional development workshop. These workshops can be the type of pedagogically focused workshops typically offered by CCCOnline staff or they can be content-based workshops offered to peer faculty in the faculty lounges. In example, an instructor who attended a conference for biology faculty could report on new developments relevant to the biology courses in their faculty lounge after returning. Compensation is sometimes available for these presentations; see your program chair if you are interested.

Chapter 9, Other Resources

CCOnline maintains a small lending library with texts on online learning and instructional design theory and practice.

Innovate: the Journal of Online Education, published by Nova Southwestern University, <http://innovateonline.info/index.php?>

The Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET), the cooperative for advancing the effective use of technology in higher education. <http://www.wcet.info/>

See specifically their bibliography on current research into quality in distance learning at <http://www.wcet.info/resources/research/>

Stephen Downes' Blog on Technology and Learning, <http://www.downes.ca/>, "Founded in 1995, Stephen's Web is best described as a digital research laboratory for innovation in the use of online media in education. More than just a site about online learning, it is intended to demonstrate new directions in the field for practitioners and enthusiasts."

The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, published by Athabasca University, <http://www.irrodl.org/> Website includes links to most distance learning journals.