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# GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE TEACHING

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**Revised Spring 2019 by the Cuyamaca College Online Teaching and Learning Committee**

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April 25, 2019

Dear Faculty Members:

Teaching an online course for the first time can be a daunting process, especially since achieving academic quality is not simply a matter of transferring a replica of what you do in classroom to the online environment. Online learning requires students to become more active and self-directed learners, so most instructors need to learn to teach somewhat differently while maintaining the same level of academic rigor they have always delivered in the classroom. Teachers must also learn how to use new technology to deliver content, communicate, and manage online classrooms. The *Guide to Best Practices in Online Teaching*, created by the Online Teaching and Learning Committee, was written with these issues in mind.

These standards focus on the needs of instructors, students, and administrators, offering guidelines in areas such as instructor competencies, technical support, equipment needs, rigor, contract issues, costs, student needs, accessibility, and other student support services. It was written to be a set of benchmarks the college should strive to meet whenever possible.

The Online Teaching and Learning Committee hopes the *Guide to Best Practices in Online Teaching* proves to be a useful resource, a guide that will inspire all involved parties to continue to create a quality online learning program at Cuyamaca College. If you have any further questions or concerns about the issues described in this document, please contact any committee member. We are always happy to mentor interested instructors.

Sincerely,

Jodi Reed and Kerry Kilber-Rebman

Co-Chairs of the Online Teaching and Learning Committee

## INTRODUCTION

The Online Teaching and Learning Committee at Cuyamaca College recommends the following Best Practices for all online instruction. These standards incorporate the combined practical knowledge gleaned from online instructors at Cuyamaca College, as well as information gathered from research in the field.

The Online Teaching and Learning Committee works in conjunction with the College Technology Committee and Academic Senate and submits recommendations for consideration and approval to those bodies as needed. In addition, it coordinates and communicates with other college committees when appropriate. The committee is led by the Distance Education Coordinator and the Dean of Learning and Technology Resources. Members include eight faculty members, the Instructional Design Technology Specialist, and a faculty representative from Disabled Student Programs & Services.

This Guide to Best Practices has been developed to serve as a guideline and recommendation for instructors, students, and administrators to follow to ensure the college is offering a quality online educational experience for all involved.

## REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Our DE program is guided by state and federal regulations and guidelines from ACCJC, the California Academic Senate, and Online Education Initiative (OEI). Title V of the California Code of Regulations includes [guidance for distance education](#), updated in March, 2019. Here's a summary:

### Separate Course Approval

Title 5 [§ 55206](#) requires an addendum that addresses how course outcomes will be achieved in a DE format, how regular effective communication will be achieved, and how the course will meet accessibility requirements. This is why our curriculum committee must approve a [Distance Learning form](#) before a course can be taught online.

### Faculty Selection

Title 5 [§ 55208](#) states "instructors of distance education shall be prepared to teach in a distance education delivery method consistent with local district policies and negotiated agreements." Our requirements for training are outlined below and on our [Getting Started webpage](#).

### Regular and Effective Contact

Title 5 [§ 55204](#) stipulates that any part of a course offered via DE must include "regular effective contact between instructor and students, and among students, either synchronously or asynchronously, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities." See our [Regular and Effective Contact Policy](#) for details and suggestions.

### Accessibility

Title 5 [§ 55200](#) says that instruction provided through DE is subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This means that required

learning materials, activities, and assessments must be accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Training requirements outlined on our [Getting Started webpage](#) include accessibility.

### Student Authentication

For accreditation requirements, instructors must utilize a student authentication system such as Canvas to provide a secure login and password.

### Attendance/Drop Policy

Due to federal regulations and audits, we are required to drop students who are not participating. The syllabus should clarify expectations for participation (activities and frequency) and consequences for inactivity.

## PREPARING TO TEACH ONLINE

The Online Instructor Certification Policy was endorsed by the Cuyamaca Academic Senate (see Minutes of 5/14/09) and the Instructional Council (now Instructional Leadership Advisory Team). An instructor who meets the preparation guidelines in the Online Instructor Certification Policy must demonstrate competence with:

1. Canvas Learning Management System
2. Online pedagogy
3. Accessibility

Our [Getting Started webpage](#) suggests training pathways.

Instructors and chairs/coordinators should contact the Distance Education Coordinator (Jodi Reed) to assess readiness for online teaching well before the first online class assignment at Cuyamaca.

## SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success depends on a complex blend of learning materials, learning activities, interaction, and assessment, all packaged in a way that makes expectations clear to the student. Following are suggestions from experienced online teachers.

### Orientation

- Communicate with students before the course begins. Provide clear instructions on how to get started in the class and let students know dates for any required meetings, proctored tests, or synchronous learning activities.
- Offer an orientation to online learning. We suggest you require students to complete modules 1-4 of the [Quest for Online Success](#) course, which includes a Smarter Measure learning readiness assessment. This should take 1-2 hours and you can have students submit their completion badge and submit/discuss their Smarter Measure results. Contact the Distance Education Coordinator if you want help with this.
- Offer a Canvas orientation. You could link to our [Learn Canvas](#) course for students.
- Offer a course orientation that includes
  - Canvas and course overview

- Course goals, expectations, student learning outcomes, structure and related policies
- Technical information (usernames & passwords, hardware and software requirements, etc.)
- Methods of communication & expectations for response times
- How to succeed
- Practice quiz about the orientation/syllabus
- Clarify the following in your syllabus (see [template and examples](#) for wording suggestions):
  - Grading & late work policy
  - communications/regular effective contact policy
  - Attendance/drop policy that describes attendance in terms of course activity rather than just logging in
  - Information about accommodations and Disabled Student Programs and Services
- Link to support services and troubleshooting tips where they are most needed throughout the course.

### Course Design & Content/Learning Materials

- Organize the course into modules/units that are consistently structured and logically sequenced.
- Assign Canvas due dates for all assignments. Students shouldn't have to search to find what to do and when to do it. A schedule in the syllabus is not enough.
- Navigation throughout the online components of the course should be logical, consistent, and efficient.
- Clearly communicate learning objectives for each learning unit so students know what is expected.
- Create a home page that clarifies the course sequence and dates for modules.
- Use headings to chunk information on pages.
- Include robust, current learning materials and activities.
- Make use of rich media such as graphics, audio, and video.
- Embed instructions in content to help students process and engage in active learning. For example, explain what to look for in a video or guide students to take notes while reading.
- Use the Cuyamaca [Pre-semester Checklist](#) to make sure your course is ready.

### Regular and Effective Contact

Title 5 and accreditation requires regular and effective contact in online teaching. Here are some approaches to satisfy the requirements (see [Regular and Effective Contact Policy](#) for details):

- Clearly state instructor responsiveness standards (turn-around time for student questions, discussions, and grading). We recommend that you respond to messages by the next business day and grade assignments within a week or two.
- Provide meaningful and regular instructor-initiated contact such as
  - Weekly announcements that provide an overview, communicate relevance, and offer encouragement and guidance
  - Timely, meaningful feedback on assignments
  - Immediate, personalized encouragement when a student falls behind (monitor student progress weekly)

- Discussions where the instructor participates
- online office hours (use online conferencing)
- Create regular opportunities for student-student interaction. This is a new requirement effective March, 2019. This could include:
  - peer review
  - group interactions (study groups, assignments, projects, field trips, etc.)
  - online discussion
  - online conferences

## Assessment

- Incorporate a variety of graded learning activities regularly throughout the course.
- Use authentic assessment activities to facilitate transfer. This means assignments that require unique work that applies course knowledge and skills rather than multiple choice quizzes. These generally require more complex feedback from the teacher. Authentic assessment allows the teacher to get to know the student's work, reducing the possibility of cheating or plagiarism.
- Clarify expectations by writing clear instructions and including scoring rubrics.
- Provide timely and meaningful feedback. We recommend that faculty grade assignments and provide feedback within 1 week of the due date.

## Accessibility

- Use headings in Canvas content and documents.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists in Canvas content and documents by using list tools rather than manual formatting.
- Use meaningful text for hyperlinks - don't just paste the URL.
- Configure tables with header rows and columns and make sure content is organized so screen readers will read content in the correct order (top to bottom, left to right).
- Make sure there's enough color contrast between the foreground text and background so the text is readable.
- Make sure color isn't the only means for conveying information.
- Provide alternative text for all images. The text should provide context for a person with low or no vision.
- Video must be captioned. Live video should include captions if needed.
- Audio must include a transcript.
- For slides, use accessible layouts and formats. Give each slide a unique title. Ensure that all text is visible in outline view.
- Use built-in Canvas and document accessibility checkers.
- For audio and video, avoid auto play and provide a means to pause, stop, forward, rewind, and control the volume.

## Student Authentication

Here are some suggestions for ensuring that the student enrolled is doing the work:

- Get to know your students early in the semester with online conferences or discussions.
- Provide on-campus or proctored exams.
- Award grades based on work product rather than exams.

- Make assignments requiring personal or original work.
- Post a detailed plagiarism policy.
- Use anti-plagiarism software.
- Use timed tests and randomize test questions.
- Require personal identification.

## Equity

Cuyamaca is committed to [equity](#). Success and retention for underrepresented student populations is lower in online classes than in traditional classes. Consider the following to help reduce the equity gap in online classes:

- Use [low or zero cost textbooks and materials](#). The California Academic Senate recommends, “Faculty teaching courses online should be cognizant of the digital divide and provide alternatives, when pedagogically sound, for software programs and other resources, including the use of open educational resources (OER).” For a detailed discussion about equity, see their publication: [Ensuring An Effective Online Program: A Faculty Perspective](#).
- There are specific teaching techniques that will help reduce equity gaps. Consider @ONE’s [Certificate in Online Teaching Principles](#) to learn these techniques. Contact [Jodi Reed](#) (Distance Education Coordinator) to see if you can be reimbursed for these courses.
- Include modules 1-4 of Cuyamaca’s [Quest for Online Success](#) in your orientation.

## Course Evaluation

We recommend that faculty make use of the [CVC-OEI Course Design Rubric](#) to assess their online courses. Those evaluating can review [Suggestions for Evaluating Online Courses](#).

## Online Conferencing

Although this is not appropriate for all online classes, some faculty find it helpful to conduct synchronous web conferencing sessions. Teachers can include ConferZoom in their Canvas course to make it easier for students to connect ([see instructions](#)). Zoom provides the following advantages:

- Students can ask questions and get immediate feedback
- Students can chat and collaborate with each other using the chat tool
- Lectures can be captioned for accessibility
- Recorded lectures can be viewed by students unable to attend the live lecture.
- Recorded lectures can be paused when needed which makes it easier for students to take notes, and allows students to focus on concepts rather than writing notes
- Application sharing allows the instructor or students to share any document, program, and website with the class
- A web cam, while not required, allows the instructor to communicate with the class via video, creating a more personal interaction with students
- Students can connect via computer or mobile device

# RESOURCES

## Online Teaching

- Cuyamaca's [teaching online website](#) includes links to
  - [Getting Started with teaching online](#)
  - [Regular and Effective Contact Policy \(pdf\)](#)
  - [Online Course Syllabus Template and Examples](#)
  - [Suggestions for Evaluating Online Courses \(pdf\)](#)
  - [Accessibility Checklist \(pdf\)](#)
- For specific questions, advice, or course review, contact [Jodi Reed](#) (Distance Education Coordinator) or [Rhonda Bauerlein](#) (Instructional Design Technology Specialist).
- Our [Online Teaching and Learning Committee](#) intranet site includes committee documents, state guidelines, data and reports, and more.
- [Online Network of Educators \(@ONE\)](#) offers online courses, webinars, and more.

## Canvas

To get started, see [Canvas Faculty Training](#). We also recommend that you refer to [Faculty Canvas Resources](#), a Canvas course that is continually updated. If those don't answer your specific questions, contact [Rhonda Bauerlein](#) (Instructional Design Technology Specialist).

## Accessibility

To get started, see [Accessibility workshop and resources](#). You can also work through our Accessibility module in [Faculty Canvas Resources](#). If those don't answer your specific questions, contact [Brian Josephson](#), [Disabled Students Programs and Services \(DSPS\)](#).

## Technical Support

For technical difficulties, contact the [Help Desk](#).

## Articles

- [Principles for Quality Online Teaching](#). Online Network of Educators (@ONE)
- [How to Be a Better Online Teacher Advice Guide](#). Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019.
- [CVC-OEI Online Course Design Rubric](#). CVC-OEI Resources
- [Ensuring an Effective Online Program: A Faculty Perspective](#). California Academic Senate, 2018.