

# Teaching Online? Getting Started Tips

Welcome to your role as instructor for a distance education course delivered the Office of Learning Technology (OLT) for the Winter Session 2007.

We wanted to be sure that you had some resources to support you in your first weeks of teaching online. The following tips were pulled together based our collective experience as online instructors and learners. We hope you'll find them useful.

## Your Resources

**Teaching in Vista?** : It is important that you take some time to orient yourself to this new environment before your course starts. Contact your course developer or [emily.renoe@ubc.ca](mailto:emily.renoe@ubc.ca) for assistance. Check out the resources on UBC's E-learning site: <https://www.elearning.ubc.ca/home/index.cfm>

**Faculty Service Centre (FSC):** You should (by now) have a login and id required to access the FSC portal. This will allow you to view your classlist, send group emails prior to the opening of the course and enter final grades . If you are not set up with this id, please request access at <http://www.students.ubc.ca/facultystaff/fsc.cfm?page=access>

**Campus Wide Login (CWL):** Along with your email address, **your CWL ID is the primary identifier** you use in making contact with support resources on campus. If you haven't set up your CWL account yet, click here: <http://www.cwl.ubc.ca/accounts/createanaccount.html> Once you have your CWL, send it to your web programmer or course developer and you will be added to your course sections.

**OLT Instructor's Guide:** This guide is your key to information about distance education and your instructional role: [http://olt.ubc.ca/distance\\_learning/instructors\\_guide/](http://olt.ubc.ca/distance_learning/instructors_guide/)

**TAG:** For information about upcoming workshops related to online teaching, WebCt, etc.: <http://www.tag.ubc.ca/>

**Technical Support:** [olthelpdesk@exchange.ubc.ca](mailto:olthelpdesk@exchange.ubc.ca)

**Teaching at a Distance Weblog:** Resources and information specifically for instructors teaching distance courses: <http://weblogs.elearning.ubc.ca/distanceteaching/>

## Resources for Learners

**Resources for Learning:** It is useful to familiarize yourself with the resources available to learners who are new to online learning.

OLT's Orientation to Online Learning:

[http://www.webct.ubc.ca/SCRIPT/orientation/scripts/serve\\_home](http://www.webct.ubc.ca/SCRIPT/orientation/scripts/serve_home) (you will need to be added in to the site in WebCT or Vista– send your request and CWL to [emily.renoe@ubc.ca](mailto:emily.renoe@ubc.ca))

Distance Learning Information and Course Descriptions:

<http://www.olt.ubc.ca/>

LEAP: students' online resource for academic support: [www.leap.ubc.ca](http://www.leap.ubc.ca)

UBC's [E-Learning](#) site (help for learners and instructors using WebCT 4.1)

OLT's [Learners' Guide](#): recently been updated. A revised version is accessible via the OLTwebsite:

[http://olt.ubc.ca/distance\\_learning/learners\\_guide/](http://olt.ubc.ca/distance_learning/learners_guide/)

## Communicating with your Learners

It is **important** to send an email to all of the students in your course on or before the day the course opens. OLT sends a general welcome and orientation (which you should receive a copy of) but you will want to make your own connection with students. You can do this easily by using the email tools through the Faculty Service Centre.

Following is a sample of an email message sent to learners on the opening day of an online course. Feel free to modify it according to your own preferences and course delivery mode:

*Welcome to (Course name and number)!*

*Please follow the directions you have been provided with for accessing your course and acquiring course materials. If you need further reference, check the OLT website at: [http://olt.ubc.ca/distance\\_learning/](http://olt.ubc.ca/distance_learning/)*

*Once you have created your account and logged into the site you should familiarize yourself with some of the items on the left navigation bar. If this is your first online course, I encourage you look through the Orientation website that you have been given access to. It should appear on your list of courses on your MyWebCT page.*

*Whether you are in a print or online course, you should read the Introduction, Welcome and/or Course Overview section of the site or course manual, taking a look at the course schedule, and glancing at the assignment requirements.*

*If your course is online, go into the section called Discussions or Forums. You should always read the Announcements forum first, since this is where I will be posting important messages. You will notice that I have already posted a welcome message--try posting your own 'hello' message in the Main forum that introduces yourself to your classmates. If you are having any technical problems, you can contact the DET helpdesk at [dethelpdesk@exchange.ubc.ca](mailto:dethelpdesk@exchange.ubc.ca). It is also important that you read your [Learner's Guide](#). It contains important information about distance education.*

*The course will get busy very quickly, so I encourage you to get logged on and become familiar with the content as soon as possible. I look forward to reading your introductions!*

## Welcoming Learners Into Your Course

A welcome message is important in setting the tone for the course.

You have only about one minute and one opportunity to make a first impression ... what would you like your students to think about the course, how are you going to grab their attention? In your first message you want to capture the learner's interest and motivate.

Think back to the 'first day' of a course that you enjoyed. Can you remember what the instructor said that immediately grabbed your interest on the course? Can you remember how it was said?

Most certainly it had to do with presenting you with some idea that it would be an interesting and challenging course that would test your abilities, and that he or she would be there to offer support when required.

According to the Task Value Expectancy Model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), two conditions have to be present to engage and motivate learners:

- They must value what they are doing.
- The perceived cost to be successful at what they are doing should not be greater than the value assigned to it.

As an instructor, part of your role is to manage learner's perceptions of these two conditions, and the task begins in your first interaction with the students: the Introduction Welcome message. Other important considerations for setting the tone are in the course description and the course schedule where the course elements are laid out, timelines attached and the assessment structure is made clear. These will be discussed in later updates.

Remember, most people experience some level of anxiety when presented with something new and unknown; setting support structures, clear expectations, scaffolding, and guidance will help students be more successful in the course. Learners will find value in the course if they perceive it as interesting (relevant), if it helps them achieve a goal (or many small goals), or if they feel they have or will be developing the competencies required to be successful learners. Next is an example of an introduction message that takes these two elements into account:

*Welcome to this course. I am looking forward to being your instructor and I do hope that, when the course is over, you (and I as well) will have enjoyed the experience.*

*This is the first time that course ... has been offered on the web and so I face, as much as you do, a sharp learning curve. In constructing the course I tried to make its content as good and as effective as I know how, but there are certainly some rough spots - things that need improvement. It is VERY important that you let me know whenever you encounter problems.*

*The discussion forum lies at the heart of this course. For the course to be successful, participation in the discussion is required. In that way, we can learn together and build a sense of community and shared achievement.*

*Don't be afraid to ask questions, ask for clarification, and share your ideas. As instructor, I will be acting as guide to the discussion. I won't be laying down the law or telling anyone what to think. So don't be afraid of what I or anyone else shares in the forum. I will certainly intervene if a discussion goes off course.*

*The subject of this course is a very controversial and complex. It is easy but not very rewarding to be moralistic and condemnatory. Let's keep the tone of the discussion moderate.*

*Finally, it is important that contributions to the discussion focus on the subject and that they be as brief and cogent as possible. So, taking my own advice, let me sign off here. Remember, my name is .... I am here to guide you through the content and support your learning as you discuss issues and concepts presented here with myself and your peers.*

In the above example, some elements are purposely included to reduce learners' anxiety (thus cost), and others are purposely included to add value and grab student's interest and engagement.

**Reference:**

Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivation, beliefs, values, and goals. Annual Review of Psychology, 53, pp. 109-32.

## Checking your Course Website

By now, you have probably thoroughly checked your course website to ensure that all updates are in place. Specifically, you will want to check:

- The course schedule to ensure that assignment dates and deadlines are posted accurately.
- The assignment requirements (to ensure that these are clear and relevant to the assignments you are using this term).
- Grading structure
- Exam information.

Any edits or updates should go to the Instructional Designer assigned to your course. If you don't know who that is, contact [doug.cronk@ubc.ca](mailto:doug.cronk@ubc.ca)

## Preparing for Exams

**Note: exam dates (or tentative dates) should be posted in the course schedule from the beginning of the term.** If your course has an invigilated face to face exam, you can refer to Exams information posted on the [Student Services site](#) for distance learners . This will provide you with tentative dates to post as a TBA until the exact date is confirmed by Enrolment Services. Note that **all students must now apply to write exams** – except if the exam is delivered online.

Invigilators are hired for exams so you do not need to attend the exam session for your course.

If you have any questions related to exams or to view exams used previously for your course, contact Shelia Williamson – DE exams clerk in Enrolment Services at [sheila.williamson@ubc.ca](mailto:sheila.williamson@ubc.ca) or by phone at 604 822 8116.

If your course has an **online exam**, you will want to confirm, with your web programmer , the details regarding the date and timing of the exam you wish to make available to your learners. We encourage instructors to set online exams for the first exam weekend scheduled for distance learners in the month your course ends. Refer to the exam schedule link above.

## Guidelines for Teaching

**Effective Teaching Principles and Practices** are posted on the TAG website (UBC's Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth) at:  
<http://www.tag.ubc.ca/resources/evaluation/appendixc.php>

The Senate ad hoc Committee on Teaching Quality, Effectiveness and Evaluation (1998/99) developed this set of principles and examples of practice. They are generic in nature, and can be modified to suit specific disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, include online learning.

Please have a look at these in considering your own teaching practice.

## Key Contacts

### **Student registration issues/problems:**

Before close of registration: [distance.education@ubc.ca](mailto:distance.education@ubc.ca) . Telephone 604 822 9836 or long distance at 604 1 877 272 1422. In the case of an urgent problem requiring attention contact Paul Poole at 604 822 1428.

After close of registration: [distance.education@ubc.ca](mailto:distance.education@ubc.ca) or Susan Wong at 604 822 6550.

### **Course extension requests:**

[distance.education@ubc.ca](mailto:distance.education@ubc.ca) or Linda Haftner at 604 822 3768.

### **Course withdrawal information:**

[distance.education@ubc.ca](mailto:distance.education@ubc.ca). Telephone 604 822 9836 or long distance at 604 1 877 272 1422.

**Course materials issues (for instructors only)** contact our Course Support Liaison: Susan Wong at 822 6550 or [susan.wong@ubc.ca](mailto:susan.wong@ubc.ca). Student questions should be directed to the Bookstore.

### **Examinations:**

[sheila.williamson@ubc.ca](mailto:sheila.williamson@ubc.ca) 604 822 8116.

### **Course content edits/ technical issues:**

Contact the course developer/web programmer assigned to your course.