

Tech-Flex: TIPS FOR SUCCESS When Planning Your Course

Keep the following tips at hand to make your entire hybrid teaching experience go more smoothly, from planning to building to execution.

Tip 1: Take it easy!

- Start the entire course development process early — at least 3-6 months in advance — and produce actual learning modules that meet specific learning goals and are relatively easy to manage and grade.
- Redesign is an incremental process. Try not to include too many new activities at first. Start small and build it one piece at a time.
- Experiment and learn as you go. Do not be afraid of unfamiliar technologies
- Keep technology use simple in order to avoid turning the course into a support nightmare and gradually add more advanced technology.
- Remember that as you increase significantly the number of assignments and opportunities for feedback, you also potentially increase your own work load. Don't burn yourself out!

Tip 2: Focus on design, not technology

- Critically re-examine course goals and objectives and consider carefully how they can best be achieved in the hybrid environment.
- Develop new learning activities that capitalize on the strengths of the online and on-campus learning environments.
- Avoid the common tendency to cover too much material and include too many activities in the redesigned course, resulting in a "course and a half."
- Don't overload the course: online activities take longer than you think they will.
- Focus on the integration of the online and on-campus components. Connecting what occurs in class with what is studied online is critical so instructors do not end up teaching two parallel but unconnected courses.
- Review the examples of hybrid courses available through this site to think about different schedules for in-class/online work, and the implications of those different schedules for the learning activities you have planned.

Tip 3: Use resources already available

- Search for discipline-specific Web sites for available content.
- Search MERLOT, OER, Educause, and other flagship education websites.
- Look for publisher content available online, especially in lower-level courses.
- Use online help resources such as facilitation of group work, managing discussion forums, etc.

Tip 4: Don't go it alone

- Talk with and get advice/feedback from experienced hybrid course instructors.
- Discuss your problems and progress with colleagues, whether they are using the hybrid or not.

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- Get feedback and support from faculty who have taught hybrid courses or professionals from your faculty development or technology centers, like the UW-Milwaukee Learning Technology Center.

Tip 5: Manage your students' expectations

- Explain and justify the hybrid course format and assignments clearly and repeatedly.
- Make sure that students understand the equivalence between the amount of work in traditional class and in a hybrid class.
- Draw your students' attention to special technical needs, or particular assignments that may require additional resources: not all online work can be completed at home.
- Make all assignments and other course expectations as explicit as possible right from the start. In particular, make sure that the schedule of in-class and online work is clear to the students, and that due dates are stated explicitly and repeatedly.
- Identify and develop plans, materials, and activities to help students with the technology and time management challenges many encounter.

Tip 6: Prepare for anticipated problems

- Use simpler technologies to reduce risk and complications.
- Break down and phase in longer assignments.
- Provide time management tips for students.
- Be very clear about what students are expected to do, and how you will grade them.
- Prepare technology help sheets.
- Identify place to go for live technology help.
- Develop a plan for conducting course activities when technology fails. For example, keep a backup copy of files on a home computer so you can e-mail important information to students.

Tip 7: The little things count!

- Things will occasionally go wrong; plan carefully and be flexible about making adjustments where needed.
- Ask for feedback from your students often and take their responses seriously.
- Don't organize your course too tightly. There's always some "slippage," and you need to leave room for any adjustments that you think necessary.
- During the course, falling behind or sloppy record keeping can be fatal: stay current and keep copies of everything. Set aside time to focus on the online components, including reading student postings and assignments.
- Use the tools in the course management system to get organized and stay organized.