

Teaching effectively in the virtual world

There is an age-old query in education: *Is teaching an art or a skill?* A trick question, of course, as it is both. A newer twist on the question is: *Does teaching a course in a face-to-face (F2F) environment require the same “art and skill” as instructing a course in an online environment?* I think the answer lies in recognizing and adapting to the variations between these platforms. They are different enough that your effectiveness in a F2F environment does not automatically translate to the online platform.

Teaching a course in a remote, synchronous manner is distinctly different than teaching one in a classroom environment (and has its variations from any asynchronous coursework you may have done in the past as well). This primer is to tune your awareness to some of the differences as you work through being effective in a virtual classroom.

The tips that follow have been taken into consideration with the design of our online course offerings.

- *Be present*

Being present in an online environment is an important component of connecting with your class, building rapport, and fostering a sense of belonging. To reduce the feeling of distance, log onto your platform at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the session. Turn on your camera and microphone and interact with people as they sign in. Also, use the Chat Box to communicate with the class. Setting the stage for interaction at the start of the course and the start of each day can reduce “distance” between participants.

- *Be very deliberate and explicit with your instructions and expectations*

In a F2F experience, you and your participants have the benefit of reading body language and facial expressions. Additionally, you are not competing with the many distractions of 15 different home/office environments. For this reason, the slides for this course are built with instructions for the expectation of how and when to interact as well as where to be (main classroom or a breakout site). Use the slides to ensure everyone understands your verbal explanations.

- *There will be technological challenges.*

Know this and be prepared with contingency plans. If a lead instructor drops out, the second needs to be prepared to jump right in. If participants are having issues, have a person designated to assist so as not to interrupt the flow of the class.

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

- Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

- Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

- Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

- Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

For more information, contact Mr. Geoff Jones at geoffry.e.jones@socom.mil, (910) 396-2518.

It is best practice that at the very least, when a person is speaking, his/her camera and microphones should be on. If bandwidth or connectivity seems to be an issue, consider having all cameras off (except for the instructor's and the speaker's). Also, be consistent in reminding others to mute their microphones if they are not speaking.

- *You have the benefit of a Chat feature that should be harnessed to infuse energy and to garner interaction.*

The Chat feature is a very powerful tool. You will find that participants are more comfortable chatting comments than speaking them. The course is designed with this in mind. The next section will outline some variations to using the Chat. Slides are designed for the course that outline the expectations for the Chat.

Another consideration for the use of the Chat box is to have the co-instructor/coach monitor the chat for the instructor who is leading the activity. Cognitive Load is high in speaking to a class, maybe from a PPT slide, and then monitoring people's comments or questions. Use the box as a springboard for discussion. Ask the question, wait for people to post, and then ask for clarification/explanations based on what is written. There are several methods you can use—as the co-instructor or lead instructor—to expand the use of the Chat Box during class.

- *Amplify*—draw attention to important ideas/concepts in the comments and ask for the authors to expand on or explain their responses.
 - *Aggregate*—find and discuss patterns in the responses, or ask your participants to do so
 - *Expand*—as people begin to post their ideas, encourage others to reply to a post and deepen or expand on the idea with other examples or clarification
 - *Model*—respond to chats to demonstrate what you expect in terms of both interaction with ideas and analysis of them
- *Embrace your “Wait Time” especially for Chat Box responses.*

Working with instructors, we discuss waiting for a 10 second count before rephrasing or readdressing a question. The time is longer in an online environment, and if participants are typing responses, will be even longer. Don't just jump into a discussion after the first 2-3 posts in your Chat Box. Wait, and encourage those that have posted to read over the other posts, while encouraging those that haven't posted to still post their thoughts. If you don't wait for the slower posters, you will find that no one will post their thoughts once you begin your discussion or exploration of what came first.

An additional consideration is to have some music ready. A class playlist can go a long way in lightening the mood of the class and eliminating the rather oppressive silence while waiting for Chat responses.

- *Use your instructing team*

As mentioned previously, use your instructor team to assist with monitoring the chat box and calling on people to explain and expand upon their posts. In addition, co-instructors can assist with pasting the text from instruction slides into the Chat box. To do this, open up a PPT presentation and copy the text you would like to share. Hover over the Chat box and paste in the text.

Any time a slide is shown and then minimized (to show video or to encourage a discussion) is a good time to paste in instructions. Remember, we need to be deliberate and explicit. Even an activity as simple as introducing oneself can get off track without a visual reminder of the points to include in one's introduction. Simply copy the Introduction Points into the Chat box as a visual, continuous reminder of the expectation.

Interaction methods in a virtual world

To keep the energy and interaction in your virtual classroom, you need to have various methods by which to "Pull" information from participants. Below are descriptions of the types of interactions built into this course.

There is a separate slide deck developed with the instructions for these various interactions. Instructors should communicate as to which strategy they would like to employ and paste the text instructions (from the appropriate slide) into the Chat Box.

Think-Write-Post

Instruct participants to simply think about the question posed, write a response in the Chat Box and then post it. This is a typical chat box response. The instructor team should use the chat posts as springboards (amplify, aggregate, expand) for "PULL" discussion and to develop learning points. If this is done during a video observation, it becomes a Running Chat.



Running Chat

The Running Chat method allows participants and instructors to post comments and/or questions as a video or learning event is taking place. Don't hesitate to make your own observations or ask prompting questions yourself to keep participants focused on the learning points. If a lecture or discussion is taking place, the running chat can still be used for people to post agreement or ask clarifying questions in real time. Again, this works best with instructors working in tandem to manage the back channeling of comments.

RUNNING CHAT

Watch this clip and observe. **Listen** and **analyze**.

Write your thoughts in the chat box **AND POST IN REAL TIME**.

Continue to post your thoughts and/or comment on others'.



Think-Write-Pause-Post

Instruct participants to think about and write a response, but **DO NOT HIT POST** until asked to do so. If you are using music for "Wait Time", you can instruct them to **POST** when the music stops. Be sure to still **WAIT 10-15** more seconds after the "Post" to allow for people to finish typing. If you just start discussing posts with the first few that respond, others will be discouraged from interacting. Again, the instructor team should use the chat posts as springboards for "PULL" discussion and to develop learning points.

THINK • WRITE • PAUSE • POST

Watch this clip and observe. **Listen** and **analyze**.

Write your thoughts in the chat box.

Do NOT hit enter until you are asked to do so



Think-Write-Pause-Post-EXPAND

This method could be done without the pause as well. Instruct participants to think about and write a response, after posting. Ask them to post comments on others' posts. Encourage them to expand on what a colleague has posted or agree/disagree. Another option is to encourage participants to find commonalities among the threads and explain what themes they see.

This option allows the instructor to take a break from being the one to analyze and grapple with the various ideas and has participants do this instead.

THINK • WRITE • PAUSE • POST • EXPAND

Watch this clip and observe. **Listen** and **analyze**.

Write your thoughts in the chat box and post as you are ready.

After your initial post, expand or comment on someone else's ideas or find commonalities/themes in what you are reading.

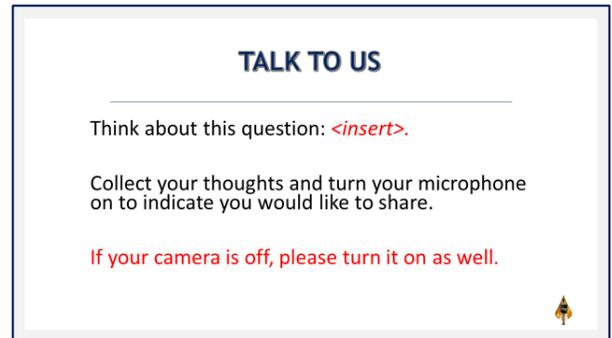


Talk to Us

Talk to Us is simply instructing participants to use their cameras and mics to respond to a question or to share an observation. You can have them post an emoji in the Chat Box or do a virtual hand raise if your platform has one. Alternatively, you can ask people to turn on their cameras when they have a comment, allowing you to call on people to share.

You can pair this with a Running Chat, encouraging people to “back channel” their thoughts on the discussion in the chat box. Again, you would use the instructor team to monitor the back channel as the lead instructor shares in the initial discussion.

The ESC stands-by to assist as you take your classes to a remote platform whether in an asynchronous or synchronous environment.



References

Establishing an online teaching presence. Duquesne University. <https://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-and-learning-at-duquesne/establishing-an-online-teaching-presence>

Being “present” in your online course. UC Davis. https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/34528/pages/being-present-in-your-online-course?module_item_id=5002

Community of Inquiry Framework. Purdue University. https://www.purdue.edu/innovativelearning/supporting-instruction/portal/files/4_Community_of_Inquiry_Framework.pdf