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Welcome to BYU-Idaho

Congratulations on becoming part of the BYUI Online Instruction family; we’re glad you’re here. This Certification Manual will help guide you through the first stage of your online instructor training by familiarizing you with the expectations and methods of teaching online for BYU-Idaho.

This manual will orient you to the BYU-Idaho Mission, Institutional Framework, Learning Model, and the BYU-Idaho Online Instructor Standards. You will implement these models and standards in your online courses as you develop your teaching skills and strategies.

As you proceed through this training, you will learn about BYU-Idaho’s unique model for online instruction; you will notice that general online practices apply while BYU-Idaho offers added depth and context to industry standards. Each section of this manual is designed to help you become an excellent online facilitator at BYU-Idaho.

In addition to the instructional information here, you will see text boxes, at the end of some sections, labeled “Additional Resources” and “Additional Activities”; these helpful options are intended to deepen your understanding and enhance your BYU-Idaho experience. We encourage you to explore these additional resources as you have time. You will also notice that each page offers a Notes column alongside the text. Please feel free to use the Notes spaces to improve your learning experience: take notes, reflect on your own insights, or make note of questions or concerns for future reference.

We hope this manual will be a useful and ongoing resource for you as you teach online for BYU-Idaho.

Additional Resources:

- “Becoming BYU-Idaho” (a history of the school and surrounding area)
- “Our Legacy”
  [http://beta.byui.edu/about-byu-idaho/our-legacy](http://beta.byui.edu/about-byu-idaho/our-legacy)
- “A New Kind of University”
  [http://beta.byui.edu/a-new-kind-of-university](http://beta.byui.edu/a-new-kind-of-university)
BYU-Idaho Mission

Preparing Disciple Leaders
Online instructors at BYU-Idaho need to be familiar with the university’s mission, “which is to prepare young people for the marvelous work the Lord has in store for them. Two companion principles define this mission: discipleship and leadership. The development of ‘disciple-leaders’ is the focus of every aspect of BYU-Idaho. We are preparing young people to be disciples of the Savior and effective leaders in their homes, in the Church, and in the communities where they live” (“BYU-Idaho’s Mission,” BYU-Idaho).

BYU-Idaho's Mission Statement
BYU-Idaho is affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Its mission is to:

1. Build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage living its principles.
2. Provide a quality education for students of diverse interests and abilities.
3. Prepare students for lifelong learning, for employment, and for their roles as citizens and parents.
4. Maintain a wholesome academic, cultural, social, and spiritual environment.

BYU-Idaho Institutional Framework
The BYU-Idaho Institutional Framework is directly related to the BYU-Idaho Mission and is centered on Personal Honor while also focusing on the Spirit of Ricks and defining principles of discipleship, leadership, and teaching.

Explaining the underlying principles of the framework, President Kim B. Clark has said, "The development of disciple leaders is the focus of every aspect of BYU-Idaho. It is important for us to understand that as the University is pursuing this mission in the 21st Century, we are developing generations of disciple leaders for the Church and for the world in the dispensation of the fullness of time." (All-Employee Meeting, May 11, 2007)

The following diagram illustrates the components of the Framework where Personal Honor, The Spirit of Ricks, Inspired Learning and Teaching, disciple Preparation, and leadership Development interact together to form the character of BYU-Idaho.
Inspired learning and teaching is an essential component of the BYU-Idaho Framework, and it is a critical aspect of being an effective online instructor for BYU-Idaho. President Clark has stated, "Inspired learning and teaching is the symbolic keystone to the overall campus experience. It brings discipleship preparation and leadership development together in one great whole" (President Kim B. Clark, All-employee Meeting, May 11, 2007).

The information in this manual will help you learn basic skills for online facilitation, and you will be able to see how those skills fit into context with the BYU-Idaho Framework. As you work through these lessons, consider ways that this framework applies to the skills and best practices of online instruction. You will continue to study this framework and its individual components in the future as part of your ongoing faculty development.

Additional Resources:
- “Realizing the Mission of BYU-Idaho: Developing Disciple-leaders
  http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/MiscellaneousAddresses/2007_05_10_Clark_RealizingtheMission.htm
- “By Study and by Faith”
  http://beta.byui.edu/about-byu-idaho/by-study-and-by-faith
The BYU-Idaho Learning Model

The BYU-Idaho Learning Model is a key component of every BYU-Idaho course, online and on campus. The basic assumption of the Learning Model is that everyone is a learner and a teacher and that learning is the result of study and faith. The Learning Model enables inspired learning and teaching and fits easily into the larger mission and framework of BYU-Idaho to develop disciple-leaders. As you prepare to teach online at BYU-Idaho, you will see how the Learning Model influences core practices and essential facilitation skills.

Access the full text of the BYU-Idaho Learning model here:  
http://www.byui.edu/learningmodel/byuiLearningModel.pdf

Access the BYU-Idaho Learning Model website here:  
http://www.byui.edu/learningmodel/src/default.htm

Review the Learning Model Teacher Process (below) to determine how to prepare alongside your students. (To access the full-page version of this process, go to the last page of the Learning Model document; use the link above):

BYU-Idaho Learning Model: Teacher Process

1. PREPARE

   Teachi Group Preparation
   - Meet with teaching group to prepare teaching plans
   - Share ideas for engaging students in the classroom
   - Make and complete assignments for class sessions and modules
   - Review key concepts

   Individual Preparation
   To Teach
   - Plan and design learning experiences
   - Facilitate student preparation
   - Study
   To Learn
   - Know and love students
   - Study

   Ongoing Spiritual Preparation
   - Trust in the Lord
   - Be worthy and obedient
   - Pray
   - Lay hold on the word of God
   - Cultivate a positive attitude

   2. TEACH ONE ANOTHER

   In-class Experiences
   - Be on time
   - Begin with prayer
   - Establish and support learning model environment
   - Require and facilitate student involvement
   - Include all students as often as possible
   - Ask inspired questions
   - Listen to the Holy Ghost to students
   - Be flexible enough to follow promptings
   - Respond in constructive ways; encourage and build students
   - Guide learning activities
   - Allow students to be responsible for learning and teaching

3. PONDER/PROVE

   After-class Experiences
   - Review learning experiences
   - Record insights
   - Administer assessment activities
   - Provide feedback to students
   - Consider needs of individual students
   - Review assessment activities and learning experiences
   - Generate additional questions to be addressed in preparation for next learning experiences

MOVE FORWARD TO PREPARE
The Instructor’s Role

BYU-Idaho online courses are developed by a team of university faculty and an instructional designer (curriculum development manager) and are facilitated by online instructors. Our online instructors teach courses they haven’t designed. This process is common in online learning communities because this approach to course design offers several advantages:

- Face-to-Face and online courses share the same outcomes and learning model architecture.
- Instructors are free to focus on teaching rather than designing, implementing, and maintaining an online course. In addition, online instructors may not always have the time, resources, or expertise to create online curriculum.
- Prepared curriculum makes it possible to quickly meet student needs while maintaining uniform course quality.

For some instructors, this approach may be a new concept and may present some challenges such as not agreeing with the design team’s approach to the course or finding it difficult to separate the responsibility of creating course content from the role of course instructor. Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, respected online instructors and educators, affirm, “a good instructor can teach just about anything if he or she is well prepared. Thus, a well-trained online instructor should be able to effectively evaluate a course and determine how it should best be delivered” (*The Excellent Online Instructor* 27).

While BYU-Idaho online instructors are not responsible for creating course content, they do play the decisive role in extending the BYU-Idaho experience to the students in their courses. It is their influence, testimony, and example that brings course content to life and makes a difference in students’ lives.

Additional Resources:
- Learning Model Principles and Processes
  [http://www.byui.edu/learningmodel/student_example.htm](http://www.byui.edu/learningmodel/student_example.htm)
- University Learning and Teaching website
  [http://web.byui.edu/LearningAndTeaching/](http://web.byui.edu/LearningAndTeaching/)

Additional Activities:
- Learning Model assessment: this assessment will help you understand how well you know the Learning Model:
  [http://www.byui.edu/LearningModel/selfassessment/lmquiz_3.htm](http://www.byui.edu/LearningModel/selfassessment/lmquiz_3.htm)
BYU-Idaho Online Instructor Standards

Online instructors at BYU-Idaho embody the Spirit of Ricks. As consecrated teachers and learners, they inspire student learning within their discipline, live lives of personal honor, actively engage their courses, communicate regularly with students, offer timely, substantive feedback to improve student work, and participate in ongoing faculty development.

The BYU-Idaho Online Instructor Standards are the baseline requirements for teaching online at BYU-Idaho. Your initial application of the Instructor Standards will help you facilitate your course according to the approved guidelines. As you become more comfortable with your students and your classroom, you will be able to find ways to do more than the minimum standard as you reach out in a spirit of inspired learning and teaching. The Online Instructor Standards will remain your basic guidelines, but you will develop your own style of teaching that will enhance your personal facilitation skills and allow you to have a greater impact on your students.

Following are the five BYU Online Instructor Standards:

**Personal Honor**

Instructors embrace and exemplify the standards of the gospel of Jesus Christ and uphold the University’s Mission, Principles of Personal Honor, and Honor Code.

**Instructor Engagement**

Instructors engage their courses at least five days a week (Monday-Saturday), establish a strong presence in the classroom, effectively facilitate class discussions, and demonstrate Learning Model processes.

**Student Contact**

Instructors respond clearly and respectfully to students within 24 hours and ensure regular, proactive contact with each student.

**Timely Feedback**

Instructors post grades within seven days of the assignment submission and provide appropriate, substantive feedback to individuals, classes, and administrators.

**Instructional Development**

Instructors participate in teaching groups, share insights, improve course facilitation and time management skills, submit weekly reports, and regularly reflect on and submit suggestions for their courses.
Instructor Standards Reflection Rubric

BYU-Idaho Online Instructors complete weekly reflection reports throughout the semester. This self-assessment tool allows instructors the opportunity to ponder their effectiveness as instructors and set goals for development and improvement. The following rubric outlines the five Instructor Standards and the criteria for using the standards as reflective self-assessment guidelines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor Standards</th>
<th>Meets or Exceeds Standards (6-7)</th>
<th>Progressing Toward Standards (3-5)</th>
<th>Below Standards (1-2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Honor</strong></td>
<td>•Personal Honor includes a variety of activities and attitudes, including adherence to the BYU Honor Code and these Instructor Standards. Your score in this area is a personal decision and reflects your own assessment of how you meet this standard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructor Engagement</strong></td>
<td>•I spent 3-4 hours per credit hour. •I engaged the course 5 days (or more) this week. •I tracked student participation closely throughout the week.</td>
<td>•I spent about 2-3 hours per credit hour. •I engaged the course 3-4 days this week. •I didn’t review participation or I reviewed it once, but I’m aware of concerns.</td>
<td>•I spent less than 2 hours per credit hour. •I only engaged the course 2 or fewer days this week. •I did not track student participation this week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Contact</strong></td>
<td>•I made regular, substantive contact with students, individually and collectively. •I feel well aware of student questions and concerns.</td>
<td>•I made contact with students though it was minimal, somewhat trivial, or limited to a few students. •I feel a little out of touch with student questions and concerns but I am aware of most major questions and concerns.</td>
<td>•I made no contact with students this week. •I am unaware of student questions and concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timely Feedback</strong></td>
<td>•I provided substantive feedback to students. •I returned assignments in less than a week of submission.</td>
<td>•I offered some feedback to students but it was unsubstantive. •I returned assignments more than a week after submission (3) or within a week of submission (5).</td>
<td>•I did not offer any student feedback this week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Development</strong></td>
<td>•I participated actively in my Teaching Group or other training opportunities, which may include participation in the BYU Online Instruction Community.</td>
<td>•I participated minimally in my Teaching Group or other training opportunities, which may include participation in the BYU Online Instruction Community.</td>
<td>•I had the opportunity to participate in my Teaching Group, the Online Community, or other training opportunities, but I did not participate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Application and Context
Now that you are familiar with the BYU-Idaho Mission, Framework, Learning Model, and the online Instructor Standards, you have the context for applying these principles in the online learning environment. A further study of the Instructor Standards and key facilitation strategies will prepare you to teach in the BYU-Idaho online classroom. The remainder of this manual focuses on developing and guiding your online facilitation practices to enable your students an excellent online experience.

Instructor Standard I: Personal Honor
Instructors embrace and exemplify the standards of the gospel of Jesus Christ and uphold the University’s Mission, Principles of Personal Honor, and Honor Code.

Questions to consider:
- How do principles of personal honor apply in the online environment?
- How can I model a life of personal honor for my online students?

Personal Honor is at the center of the BYU-Idaho institutional framework. President Kim B. Clark notes that Personal Honor “represents the consecration, obedience, and faithfulness of everyone who works and studies [at BYU-Idaho . . . ]. Obedience and faith create an environment in which the Holy Ghost can minister. This ministry is what we call the Spirit of Ricks” (“Personal Honor,” BYU-Idaho all-employee meeting, January 14, 2010).
BYU-Idaho’s Personal Honor statement has five principles:

1) Personal honor is integrity in fulfilling commitments, responsibilities, and covenants.
2) Personal honor begins with willing obedience and is fully developed when we consistently govern ourselves by true principles.
3) Personal honor increases spiritual strength through the ministry of the Holy Ghost.
4) Personal honor is central to every aspect of our lives, including the BYU-Idaho experience.
5) Personal honor brings us joy and happiness; deepens our desire to love, serve, and lift others; and ultimately helps us to become more like the Savior.

Application of Personal Honor in the online classroom comes when you are eligible to be guided by the Holy Ghost in acts of inspired learning and teaching. Because BYU-Idaho is an LDS Church institution, administrators “select employees and students who voluntarily live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Living by those standards is a condition of employment and admission . . . By enrolling at BYU-Idaho, or accepting appointment as an employee, individuals show their commitment to observe the Honor Code standards approved by the Board of Trustees ‘at all times ... and in all places’ (Mosiah 18:9)” (“University Standards”).

The following breakdown of the five principles of personal honor offers examples of how these principles might apply in your role as facilitator in your online classroom.

**Integrity**

Personal honor is integrity in fulfilling commitments, responsibilities, and covenants.

- Application of this principle in the online classroom might include attending to student needs, meeting grading deadlines, submitting reports on time, and following the Instructor Standard guidelines without fail.

**Willing Obedience**

Personal honor begins with willing obedience and is fully developed when we consistently govern ourselves by true principles.

- Willing obedience as an online instructor indicates a consistent desire to facilitate the course with strict adherence to the best practices and Instructor Standards. Actively engaging the course, assisting the students in their learning processes, and participating in teaching groups are ways to show willing obedience when facilitating online.
**Spiritual Strength**

Personal honor increases spiritual strength through the ministry of the Holy Ghost.

- Facilitating through the ministry of the Holy Ghost is an essential component of the BYU-Idaho online classroom. The Lord has said, in D&C 42:14, “the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach.” This instruction is clear and guides us in our facilitation in the BYU-Idaho online classroom.

**Central to Our Lives**

Personal honor is central to every aspect of our lives, including the BYU-Idaho experience.

- Being central to every aspect of our lives allows us to live lives of personal honor not only when we are engaged in our online classrooms but when we are away from the classroom as well. A BYU-Idaho online instructor who lives a life of personal honor will be more receptive to the Spirit while facilitating his/her course.

**Become Like the Savior**

Personal honor brings us joy and happiness; deepens our desire to love, serve, and lift others; and ultimately helps us to become more like the Savior.

- This principle has roots in Alma 53:20 and the phrase referring to the 2000 Stripling Warriors who “were true at all times in whatsoever things they were entrusted.” President Clark has said, “I believe BYU-Idaho should be a living model of the highest standards of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Being part of this community, whether as an employee or as a student, should be itself a tremendous educational experience in the principles of the gospel and the power of personal honor” (“Personal Honor,” All-employee Meeting, January 14, 2010).

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**Additional Resources:**

- “Personal Honor,” President Clark, January, 2010
  [http://www.byui.edu/allemployee/clark_personal_honor.htm](http://www.byui.edu/allemployee/clark_personal_honor.htm)
- Student Honor Office page
  [http://www.byui.edu/studenthonor/](http://www.byui.edu/studenthonor/)
Instructor Standard II: Instructor Engagement

Instructors engage their courses at least five days a week (Monday-Saturday), establish a strong presence in the classroom, effectively facilitate class discussions, and demonstrate Learning Model processes.

Questions to consider:

- How can I model active engagement in the learning process?
- How can I manage my time and efforts so as to meet student needs without becoming overburdened?
- How can my preparations help establish a learning model culture in the online classroom?

Palloff and Pratt summarize what they have learned about online students this way: “What the virtual student wants and needs is very clear: communication and feedback, interactivity and a sense of community, and adequate direction and empowerment to carry out the tasks required for the course” (*The Virtual Student* 129-130). Meeting these needs is impossible without a dedicated, engaged instructor.

But what does it mean to be engaged? We are counseled in the scriptures to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of [our] own free will” (D&C 58:27). But online instructors are faced with so many tasks. Which are most needful?

Establishing presence in the classroom is a critical practice and is accomplished by using good time management and providing regular course access and activity. Using planning tools, time management strategies, and effective I-Learn tools will allow you to show a strong presence in your classroom.
Classroom Presence
Establish classroom presence by accessing the course daily and engaging regularly in student discussions and activities.

Questions to consider:
- How does my engagement pattern affect student engagement in the course?
- What type of instructor contact have I valued most as a student?

While time spent in a course does not guarantee quality instruction, quality instruction requires, at minimum, regular course access.

We ask that instructors engage their courses five days out of the week (Monday-Saturday) and commit 3 to 4 hours a week per credit hour.

We have found that time in the course is most effective as it focuses on three key student needs: contact, feedback, and community building. In practice, maintaining that focus means that instructors manage their time so as to allow active participation in student discussions and other activities, regular feedback on student work, and an active awareness of students’ progress and needs.

While we know that committed instructors can easily dedicate more than the prescribed time to their courses, we prefer instructors focus on those tasks most meaningful to students and most instrumental in their success and manage their time efficiently so that the coursework does not become overwhelming.

Planning
Effective facilitation requires focus and planning. As you prepare to teach, it will be important for you to identify the planning tools, time management strategies, and I-Learn tools that will work best for you and make the time you spend in your course more effective and efficient.

Questions to consider:
- Many instructors like the flexible nature of teaching online, so why is weekly planning so important for online instructors?
- Which online tasks are most time consuming? Which tools or strategies can I use to more efficiently meet those needs?
- How can establishing clear expectations for instructor contact reinforce the principles of the Learning Model?
Susan Ko and Steve Rossen observe “that many who teach online automatically fall into a pattern of very intense instructor-generated activity and a great deal of one-on-one interaction. In fact, the workload issue is usually the number one complaint of first-time online instructors” (Teaching Online 220-221). This temptation to invest inordinate time in a course is aggravated by the ease and rapidity of one-to-one communication in discussion boards, through e-mail, and even synchronous chats. While individual interaction with students can be gratifying, it can quickly sap your strength and lead to burn-out.

Many of you will be teaching courses with upwards of sixty students. Because online students can feel isolated from classmates, students who might normally turn to peers for help or reassurance will turn to their instructors. While we want each student to have a positive experience in the course, if each student relies wholly on you for instruction, support, and feedback, you will quickly become overwhelmed. Addressing the needs of the one is vital, but instructors can do that best by setting clear expectations that reinforce learning model principles, planning carefully, and using course management tools effectively.

**Setting Clear Expectations:** One way to control course workload is to manage student expectations for personal instruction. You may find the following suggestions useful:

1. **Turn technical problems over to technical support.** You are certainly the first line of contact for technical issues directly related to the course (broken course links, inaccessible assignments, or missing course content.) However, students often have technical questions that are not directly tied to the course. You may well be able to answer student questions about software applications or other technical problems, but such issues can often be very time consuming. If the technical issue is unique to the student, refer him or her to the university Helpdesk for assistance.

2. **Ask students to turn first to each other.** In a Learning Model culture, questions belong to the community rather than to the individual. Ask students to post their questions on the course’s general discussion board. Respond to questions that you alone can address, but make it clear that other questions belong to the community. Reinforce the importance of teaching one another in this forum by referring students who contact you directly to post their questions online unless they are of a personal nature or require immediate attention. Similarly, if students are working together in a collaborative group, ask them to turn to each other with questions before they contact you. If they do need your assistance, ask that the
group leader contact you with those questions, reinforcing the group process.

3) **Set clear expectations for instructor interaction.** Let students know how quickly you will respond to e-mail or return feedback on major assignments. Most instructors respond to e-mail within 24 hours during the work week. Set clear boundaries. For example, you may want to make it clear that you respond to e-mail over the weekend. In addition, don’t make a practice of responding immediately to every e-mail message you receive. Students’ expectations are set by your practice. If you respond to student e-mails within the hour they are sent, students will begin to expect that kind of immediate response. Instead, set a daily time each day to read and respond to e-mail and then resist the temptation to access and respond to e-mail throughout the day.

If you need to offer detailed feedback on a major assignment, let students know when they can expect that feedback (make sure the goal is realistic) and then stick to that deadline.

4) **Use the Notes from the Instructor space, weekly announcements, and class-wide e-mails** to keep students focused on course outcomes, to encourage further thought, and to reinforce preparation and participation. Each week’s lesson begins with a link to the Notes from the Instructor, your space for posting announcements, introducing the week’s tasks, posting podcasts or tutorials, recognizing excellence, or taking the opportunity to build community. This is your space to connect with students each week.

In addition, I-Learn offers the option to e-mail the entire class, groups, or individuals; you can also post a class-wide announcement making it easy to summarize class progress, suggest areas for improvement, and build a sense of continuity and community. Mentioning a few students’ specific contributions to the class or recognizing excellent student work, lets the entire class know you are actively engaged in the course without responding to each student individually.

5) **Work to improve course design.** Work with other instructors and your teaching group leader to identify inefficiencies in course design that can be discussed in Course Improvement Councils. You will find a link for submitting suggestions and course fix requests in the instructor area of your course. If the course requires you to spend too much time on tasks that are not student-centered or that do not, by their nature, demand instructor attention, work with others in your teaching group to offer more efficient and effective alternatives.
Planning for Success

One way to manage your time effectively online is to take time to plan each week’s tasks. Some tasks, like reviewing the week’s lesson plan, posting weekly announcements, or grading will reoccur weekly. Other tasks, like responding to e-mail or participating in course discussions may require daily attention. Setting aside time for each task will help you better manage your time and ensure that each task receives sufficient attention.

An important part of this weekly planning includes reflection on the previous week’s activities. What went well? Where are students struggling? Which students may need additional encouragement in the coming week or which students might benefit from some well-deserved recognition?

Some instructors like to set aside a specific time each day to work on their courses and work through a specific routine—e-mail, I-Learn home page, discussion board, and feedback—as an example. Others may respond daily to e-mail but set aside specific days during the week to read and respond to discussion board posts or post feedback. As you teach, you will find the rhythm that works best for you. The key is to engage in weekly planning and reflection.

Using Course Management Tools in I-Learn

I-Learn’s home page includes tools that can help you more easily monitor student engagement and progress.

Dashboard

The I-Learn Dashboard on the main home page offers a quick list of all assignments waiting for feedback across all of your courses. It functions as a kind of “To Do” list, and you can access, review, and grade any assignment from this central page.

Critical Students

The Critical Students link in the Tools box on the dashboard page uses green, yellow, and red icons to indicate how well students are performing and how well they are progressing. You will be able to identify students across all your courses that are either falling behind or under-performing. Using this dashboard, you can quickly identify students who may be struggling and are in need of immediate attention. Click on the student’s name to review his/her overall performance in the class or review his/her progress towards meeting specific course outcomes. In addition, you can e-mail those students you feel need additional contact directly from this screen.

The main dashboard page also allows you to see your course list, your announcements, and the Eye on I-Learn information. You will learn more about the tools and features of our learning management system in your ongoing training.
Facilitating Discussions
Identify key principles to facilitate student discussions that deepen student learning while reinforcing the Learning Model.

Questions to consider:
- What does it mean to effectively facilitate a discussion?
- What types of questions deepen learning?
- What strategies reinforce the learning model?

In a traditional classroom, class discussions often center on the instructor. It takes a good facilitator to step aside and turn students to each other. Certainly, some questions require content knowledge and experience in the discipline that students simply don’t have. But even in those cases, skilled facilitators can provide students with the necessary context to guide them in the right direction without providing all the answers. In discussions, as in other learning activities, the journey to find answers is often as important as the answers themselves.

Following are three key principles you can use to help students more effectively engage course content and each other.

Ask Effective Questions
A key way to deepen learning is to ask good, well-thought-out questions and then allow students to be responsible for their own thoughts and ideas. There are wonderful examples of this in the scriptures. The Savior often asked questions to encourage people to ponder and apply the principles he taught (see, for example, Matthew 16:13-15, Luke 7:41-42, 3 Nephi 27:27). Consider also how the Spirit of the Lord used questions to guide Nephi when he desired to see the things his father had seen in the vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 11-14). As a skilled questioner, you can guide students to discover new ideas and to make connections with things they already know. Consider the following guidelines:

Plan and write your questions in advance: It is important to realize that anyone can ask questions, but that not all questions are created equal. Effective questioning requires skill and thought. Build your questions from core concepts you want your students to explore. Often, a single well-structured question can capture all of the main principles or concepts that a given issue or problem offers. A central question is also a way to establish the boundaries of inquiry. Plan and write out your questions in advance, as part of your preparation, so that you can effectively facilitate exploration in Teach-One-Another activities.

Use different types of questions: Think about when you will use different types of questions. Factual questions can be used to establish basic facts and help students recall and recognize information. Yes
and no questions can be used to determine a commitment or if someone agrees or disagrees. Otherwise, they have limited use. Questions that prompt deeper thinking usually promote deeper learning. Such questions often begin with words such as what, how, or why.

**Tie questions to key principles:** Tie your questions to the key principle, concept, or idea. Guide the conversation towards the heart of the issue by asking questions that focus and deepen the topic. Limit central questions to one or two per topic. Questions that help explore the topic are used more frequently, but should still be used thoughtfully and judiciously.

**Allow students to wrestle and explore.** Once you have carefully planned and asked a question, wait for responses. Allow students to think and explore possible answers. Your job is to articulate the right question. Their job is to take guidance from the question and use it to further their own learning. Don’t be so anxious to get a response that you move on after the first halfhearted response or answer the question yourself. If no one responds, it might mean that students are focused on other activities or that they do not understand the question. Find out the reasons and respond accordingly. But, if it is a critical concept, don’t give up on them. Help them wrestle through the issue.

**Ask follow-up questions:** Ask follow up questions to help you understand where the students are in their thinking while at the same time helping to direct their thoughts. Good follow-up questions deepen the learning by pushing the student to deeper analysis. Such questions often seek to move knowledge of facts to comprehension of ideas, and comprehension of ideas to application of wisdom.

**Actively listen to students:** When students answer, listen to how students respond. Active, engaged listening is an invaluable tool in understanding the learning process of your students. Listen for insights. Listen for misconceptions. Listen for clues on how they are thinking and feeling. Listen.

**Be open to pursue promptings:** Questioning and listening often lead to unexpected insights and fleeting opportunities to deepen student learning. While preparation is critical and helpful, rigidity is not. It is possible to lock-in to an overly formulaic path for the discussion. Be open to varying your direction and pursue opportunities or promptings of the Spirit as they arise (D&C 50:20). If your discussion is built around key ideas and questions, it can be profitably explored from many directions.
Don’t respond to every Post
While this may seem a simple matter of survival in a large online class, it’s tempting to feel that if you do not respond to every student, he or she will not think you are listening and attentive. Not only is responding to every post unhealthy, it can easily squash discussion as students wait for your response rather than engaging each other—putting the focus squarely back on you, and with it, the responsibility to sustain and develop the discussion.

Deepen the Discussion
A balanced approach is more effective. Resist the urge to respond to the first post and let the discussion develop before chiming in. As you do so, look for ways to deepen the discussion by posting selectively:
- Identify key underlying assumptions and ask students to re-examine them.
- Summarize the discussion’s main points, identifying contributing students by name, and then ask a follow-up question that leads students to explore the topic or issue in a new or alternate way.
- Offer an example or brief case and ask students how they would apply the principles they have discussed to this new situation.
- Identify connections between discussion threads that students have not explored and ask students to respond to each other.
- Offer an example that seemingly contradicts the current course of thinking and ask students to respond.
- Ask students with differing views to switch sides of the issue and continue their discussion from different perspectives.

Demonstrate Learning Model Processes
BYU-Idaho online courses are structured around the Learning Model architecture. You and your students will Prepare, Teach One Another, and Ponder and Prove throughout the semester as part of the course curriculum.

Prepare
*Prepare* is the first step in the Learning Model process for students and instructors. Preparation should include ongoing spiritual exercise and worthiness, small group collaboration as in your teaching groups, and individual preparation. This section focuses on the individual preparation you should consider as you prepare yourself, the learning environment, and your students.
Many examples from the scriptures demonstrate the importance of preparing to learn and teach (see Alma 17:2-3; D&C 11:20-21; 38:30). For example, we can learn much about preparing to learn and teach by studying the revealed prayer offered at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple.

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom, seek learning even by study and also by faith;

Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing, and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God; (D&C 109:7-8; see also 7-15).

Your preparation should include seeking wisdom by study and faith and by preparing and organizing every needful thing. The course outcomes, lesson plans, and lesson resources can be a source of wisdom each time you prepare for a lesson. Studying your notes about individual students’ needs can also provide wisdom and help you know what things are needful. What an accomplishment it would be if students’ first reaction on entering a course was, “This is a house of order!”

Consider the impact of the learning environment on students’ feelings of order and ability to learn. If students are confused by activity instructions, taught in ways that inhibit interaction, or are intimidated or easily distracted by the way the course is taught, learning becomes more difficult. On the other hand, if students know what to expect, preparation instructions and resources are clear, the space and activities foster participation, and the instructor provides focus, then learning happens much more readily.

Perhaps the most important goal for preparing ourselves, the environment, and our students is to invite the Spirit. Creating an environment where the Spirit of the Lord is invited and feels welcomed can help to change a good learning experience into a
transcendent one. The presence of the Holy Ghost can multiply many-fold our efforts and our abilities to learn truth.

\[
\text{Let him that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord his God, that his eyes may be opened that he may see, and his ears opened that he may hear; For my spirit is sent forth into the world to enlighten the humble and contrite} \ldots (D&C 136: 32-33)
\]

The Instructor Standards will help you prepare for learning and teaching as the semester progresses. Consult with the other instructors in your teaching group to share tips gained by experience. Find a preparation routine that works for you. Remember the underlying principle to prepare every needful thing (D&C 109:8-15) to better serve and shepherd students.

**Teach One Another**

*Teach One Another* is the second step in the Learning Model process for students and instructors. Teaching One Another should include elements of group collaboration, accountability, and assessment. This section focuses on the collaborative process within the classroom.

**Collaboration**

An essential skill in online instruction includes actively facilitating group interaction without controlling it and encouraging team ownership of collaborative processes and projects while respecting individual accountability.

**Questions:**

- What are the biggest obstacles to effective online collaboration?
- How can instructors encourage team ownership of collaborative processes?
- What strategies can instructors use to strengthen collaborative processes and maintain individual accountability?

Palloff and Pratt’s *The Virtual Student* emphasizes the importance of collaborative work:

*Going beyond online discussion to include small group work and other means by which students can collaborate helps to broaden and deepen the learning, lessens the sense of isolation that many online students feel, and allows students to test out ideas and feel a sense of connection to the course, the instructor, and the group. In general, higher levels of satisfaction with online learning occur when collaboration is an integral part of the course design. (103)*
Effective collaboration is one of the most rewarding activities in which online students can engage, but it is also one of the most difficult activities to facilitate successfully.

Following are three strategies for facilitating effective online collaboration: Anticipate Student Concerns, Insist on Student Ownership, and Maintain Individual Accountability.

**Anticipate Student Concerns:** Recognize key student attitudes and expectations that may hinder effective collaboration.

Teach one another activities are a hallmark of all BYU-Idaho online courses. We know that students often learn more and are better able to apply what they learn when they work together and teach one another. And yet, for many students, nothing causes more anxiety than the thought of engaging in online collaborative projects.

In *Assessing Learners Online*, Oosterhof, Conrad, and Ely identify three obstacles to effective online collaboration: “Inadequate management of group processes, lack of individual reward, and unequal distribution of workload” (207).

Most likely, you have heard students complain about group work that has not been adequately defined, that rewards all members equally regardless of their contributions, or that requires some members of the group—those who care about their grades—to do more than their fair share of the work. Perhaps you have even experienced this kind of group work.

The first step in effective collaboration is to realize that students’ fears are often based in prior experience and should be addressed both in the design of the activity and in its management and assessment. The following strategies may help to allay student fears and encourage effective collaboration.

1) **Recognize and Address Student Concerns.** As you introduce a new collaborative activity or project, help students understand how the project will be organized and assessed, focusing on those aspects of the activity that may cause the most anxiety and the design steps in place to address those anxieties.

2) **Establish clear objectives and guidelines for the project.** Clear guidelines make it easier for groups to collaborate effectively. Students who understand the project goals and the roles each must fill to successfully complete the project can focus on working together rather than struggling to define the project.
3) **Discuss Collaboration.** Open a discussion forum focused on what students expect from each other as they collaborate. Facilitating a discussion that allows students to identify key responsibilities and expectations for online collaboration will help build a sense of community with common goals and expectations.

4) **Create Team Contracts.** If students will be working on a lengthy project, ask them to create a team contract as a first step in the collaborative process. Team contracts can be adapted to meet specific assignment requirements, but generally team members work together to define roles and responsibilities within the team, establish how team members will communicate, create guidelines for how team members will coordinate their efforts and meet deadlines, and define clear consequences for members who don’t meet team expectations as defined in the contract.

Helping students work together to identify obstacles to successful collaboration and then providing them with the tools necessary to overcome those obstacles is an important first step in any collaborative activity. It models the type of personal responsibility and active participation you will expect as they collaborate and allows them to take ownership of the collaborative process.

**Insist on Student Ownership:** Reinforce students’ ownership of the collaborative process.

Collaboration is most successful when it is student focused and student driven. Ideally, collaborative activities will be designed to allow students ownership of the collaborative process.

1) **Ensure students have control of collaborative processes.** Make sure that students have a role in assessing collaborative work and can take steps to manage the collaborative process. Student frustration often stems from being “forced” to work together without any control of the collaborative process or its assessment. Students are much more likely to collaborate successfully when they can control their work within clear guidelines and have options for addressing issues within the group.

2) **Make group dynamics visible to the group.** As you communicate with group members, cc your responses to all others in the group, as appropriate, and send feedback to the group as a whole. If a group is struggling, redirect grievances back to the group itself and allow them to resolve the issue.

3) **Encourage Regular Reflection on Collaborative Processes.** Encourage students to reflect often on their own contributions
and the processes of the team as a whole. For lengthy projects, students should reflect on team processes shortly after the project begins, at midpoint, and as part of the final project assessment. Asking students to reflect regularly on their contributions encourages active participation. In addition, it allows team members an opportunity to identify and address issues within the group in a timely fashion.

4) **Structure the interaction of struggling groups:** If a group is struggling and seems unable to resolve the issue alone, take steps to further manage their group interaction without replacing it. You might set up intermediate deadlines to further guide group work, you might ask students to submit regular progress reports or formulate a plan to get back on track to complete the project, or you might set up a synchronous chat that will allow group members to meet in real time to discuss the project.

**Maintain Individual Accountability:** Emphasize the importance of each student’s contribution and hold students accountable for their contributions to the collaborative process.

The opportunity to teach one another is a guiding principle in group interaction. As instructors, we don’t want to do anything that robs students of their role in the collaborative process. Consider the following guidelines:

1) **Define Clear Roles for Each Member of the Team.** Help students assess group interaction by emphasizing how each member contributes to the project. Ask students to identify and fill clear roles within the group and allow them to take responsibility for those roles.

2) **Monitor the group.** Intermediate deadlines, reminders, and clear indications that you are paying attention to group members’ contributions will encourage groups to keep on task and encourage individual responsibility.

3) **Emphasize Individual Preparation.** The best collaboration occurs when each member of the group comes prepared to contribute. Requiring a preparatory assignment or asking each member of a team to come prepared with role specific information or research reinforces the necessity for individual accountability. Some instructors enforce the rule that those who don’t come prepared don’t participate.

4) **Include Self and Peer Assessments in Final Assessments:** Assessment of the final product alone is not an accurate reflection of each member’s contribution. Include self and
peer evaluations in the final project assessment, adjusting scores to reward excellence or to reflect non-participation.

Additional Resources:
- Creating a Participatory Environment
- Instructor Role in Teach One Another
- Learning in Groups

Additional Activity:
- Reflect on your own collaborative experiences. What contributed to their success or failure? How can you use your own experiences to help students collaborate successfully?

**Ponder and Prove**

*Ponder and Prove* is the third and final step in the Learning Model process for students and instructors. When you ponder and prove, you and your students will reflect individually and with a group, record learning, and note questions.

Pondering, as part of the learning process, is a frequent recommendation given by the Lord. Joseph Smith was given the following instruction, after a three-day church conference, to ponder what had been taught, “Wherefore, you are left to inquire for yourself at my hand, and ponder upon the things which you have received” (D&C 30:3). Similarly, the Savior encouraged the Nephites in America to “go ye into your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the father, in my name, that ye may understand” (3 Nephi 17:3).

Pondering is an essential step in the learning process for both instructors and students as it allows time for reflection and assessing learning outcomes. For students, reviewing previous learning promotes better retention and deeper understanding.

Applying this concept to a strictly academic setting, Palloff and Pratt encourage online faculty to reflect “on their own online teaching
practice” and “evaluate one online unit of a course or an entire teaching/learning experience” by asking descriptive and reflective questions. This practice, they say, can be used “as part of a faculty self-assessment . . . of the effectiveness of the course and faculty performance” (The Excellent Online Instructor 126-7).

Whether it be an act of pondering based in scriptural context or academic reflection for assessment purposes, pondering the results of a learning experience allows us to consider the experience and improve our performance.

Additional Resources:
- BYU-Idaho Learning Model website
  http://www.byui.edu/learningmodel/src/default.htm

Additional Activities
- Take a minute and note some additional questions that you would like to explore now or at a later time.
Instructor Standard III: Student Contact

Instructors respond clearly and respectfully to students within 24 hours and ensure regular, proactive contact with each student.

Questions to consider:

- What unique challenges and opportunities do online classes present to clear communication?
- How can instructors create a learning environment in which students feel secure communicating with each other and the instructor?

While online courses can employ a wide variety of learning activities, they often favor verbal learners—learners who are adept at gleaning and applying principles from what they read. Students who favor another learning style may become frustrated when nearly all course communication—course content, assignment instructions, and even interaction with peers and the course instructor—is mediated through the written word.

In addition, online learning requires students to take the initiative for their own learning success, a frustration for students who have come to depend on instructors and classmates for guidance and validation. Without weekly face-to-face meetings to reconnect with peers and reinforce course goals and deadlines, they can quickly become isolated and fall behind.

Online learning also strips away the visual cues we rely on to clarify and contextualize communication. Misunderstandings can result as students misinterpret the intent of a post or the tone of an instructor’s email. In addition, many online students are engaging in new and unfamiliar technologies—another hurdle to clear communication.
And yet, clear communication and consistent contact are vital to the success of any online class.

Below, we will focus on four keys to effective online communication: Managing Student’s Expectations, Modeling Effective Online Communication, Facilitating Discussions, and Building Community.

**Managing Students’ Expectations**
Identify specific ways to better prepare students for learning online.

Questions to consider:
- How do students’ expectations inform their learning experience?
- What information do students need to engage fully in the online class?
- What support resources will most students need to be successful online learners?

While it is true that online learning does pose several hurdles to clear communication, it also offers several unique opportunities. Some students who might not feel comfortable speaking out in a traditional classroom feel comfortable participating in an online environment.

In addition, online courses offer students more time for reflection. Because online exchanges often stretch over days rather than the space of a single class period, students can carefully reflect on questions and take time to craft thoughtful responses. The additional time in discussion also allows everyone the chance to participate, giving students in an online class the opportunity to be more fully engaged in the course.

Online students also have the chance to develop rich, collaborative relationships with students from many different backgrounds and interests, forging a sense of community with peers that they may not have approached in a traditional classroom.

One way to improve communication is to help shape students’ expectations. Students who expect an easy, independent study style course that they can access and complete on their own in their own time will be dissatisfied with learning model-based courses that emphasizes collaboration, interaction, and community. We can alleviate some students’ frustrations by offering an accurate picture of what they can expect from the course and what we expect from them.

**Students’ Equipment and Software Requirements**
Much student frustration comes from using new classroom technology and learning management systems. You can help students
succeed by helping them understand the technology requirements for the course:

- You can avoid many technical issues by ensuring that students are using a browser that is compatible with I-Learn.
- If your course uses virtual conferencing tools, make sure students know that they may want to purchase a microphone and headphones to participate. You will also need to purchase a webcam and microphone for use in your course. Your virtual office space has both video and audio capabilities, and you can use that virtual office to meet with students and/or record brief messages, presentations, or tutorials for students.
- Make sure students understand what types of files they can submit to you. For example, if you use Microsoft Word, ask that students submit their work in that format, or save it to a format that you can access, like rich text (.rtf) or .pdf. (If students are unsure how to save to those formats, refer them to the university help desk for one-on-one assistance.)
- If your course asks students to exchange documents, ask that they use a format that all students can access, regardless of the type of computer or application they are using; or ask that they work with others in their group to make sure everyone can access the group’s files.

Course Requirements

- Ask students to carefully review the course syllabus. All students will take a syllabus quiz as part of the introduction to the course. Review results for that quiz and share any inconsistencies with the class.
- Facilitate a discussion on the course syllabus. Ask students which part of the syllabus surprised them most, what excites them most about the course, or what aspects of the course still confuse them.
- Make sure that your initial e-mail includes information about course expectations in terms of time, collaboration with other students, deadlines, and other expectations unique to your course.
- Ask students to discuss a plan for succeeding in the Class—based on the course syllabus and introductory materials, what will they need to do to be successful? How can they contribute to a successful semester?

Modeling Effective Online Communication

Explore strategies for communicating clear expectations for online discourse, ways to model effective online communication for students, and tips for defusing conflict.
Set Clear Boundaries
One way to improve communication in an online classroom is to make the rules about what is and is not acceptable online behavior explicit. Such policies, often referred to as netiquette policies or guidelines, define rules for good online behavior.

They often include expectations for student participation, encourage courtesy and good manners, identify behaviors to avoid—like SHOUTING or bullying—and outline consequences for breaking community rules.

As you create your own class policy, remember to keep the list brief and professional. You may want to introduce these guidelines as part of the first class discussion or post the guidelines as part of the first class discussion or post the guidelines in your Notes from Instructor space and ask students to comment on their importance.

Another option is to ask students to formulate the netiquette policy for the classroom. Ask them to discuss and identify the guidelines that should govern their interaction.

Practice Professionalism
It is very easy to misinterpret the tone and intent of written communication, particularly in the quick, often informal world of e-mail correspondence. To help alleviate such misunderstandings, try sandwiching whatever information or comment you have between two positive statements.

- Start out with a positive affirmation—“Great question” or “I’m glad you contacted me” or “I can see what you mean.”
- Respond to the question or concern in a brief, professional paragraph. If you find it will take you several paragraphs to respond, a quick phone call may be more effective.
- End on a positive note—“Thank you for contacting me” or “Let me know if you have further questions” or “Keep up the good work.”

Never leave students in doubt that you are listening and that you care. Since they can’t see your face or hear your voice, positive
affirmations coupled with professional confidence and reassurance go a long way in making sure you are not misunderstood.

Finally, remember that presentation matters. A student once wrote to thank an instructor for helping her improve her “riting.” The presentation undermined the message entirely. We all make mistakes but reading the finished message aloud and completing a quick spell check will help you avoid unnecessary errors. In many cases, misspelled words are identified and underlined for you automatically; but if that is not the case, use a spell-check tool to check your spelling.

**Make the Course the Communication Hub**

Work in the first few weeks of the course to establish the course itself as the hub for communication. Each course will include a general forum for student questions or comments. Ask students to post their questions to that community board before contacting you. During the first few weeks of class, you will most likely need to reinforce this rule. If a student sends you a general question connected to the course, compliment him or her on the question and then ask that the student post it to the course discussion board so that everyone else in the course can review it and your response.

Compliment students who respond to other students’ questions or concerns, and refer to important posts from this community board in weekly announcements. Do all that you can do to draw students into the class and get them interacting with each other. You will not only lower the number of e-mails that require a personal response from you, you will also strengthen the students’ ties to each other and reinforce the importance of teaching one another.

**Defuse Conflict**

Student frustrations, whether directed at you or the course, may sometimes erupt in inappropriate discussion board posts or personal e-mail attacks. While we hope such instances are rare, it is important to know how to respond when a student lashes out at you or another student.

While it may be tempting to lash back at students who make unfounded accusations or appear to be actively working to undermine the course, you have a small window of opportunity to defuse the conflict before it escalates and affects the entire tenor and culture of your online class.

Of course, each situation is unique. Counsel with your teaching group as necessary, and follow these guidelines when addressing conflict.
- **Don’t respond to personal attacks publicly.** While a disruptive student may post cutting remarks on a public discussion board, responding in kind will only escalate the conflict and may draw other students into the fray. Instead, respond with a general acknowledgement of the students’ concerns with a note that you will respond more fully in a private e-mail. This makes it clear that private grievances should be handled privately while acknowledging the students’ concerns.

- **Respond to the content of the complaint rather than the personal attack.** This tip is tied to the previous suggestion. It is easy to get sucked into trading accusations, particularly when you feel a student is attacking you personally without cause. Resist the urge to defend yourself and, instead, focus on the content of the complaint.

- **Never call a student out in public.** While it is good practice to ask students specific questions to deepen their learning, if a student is combative or belligerent, respond to the behavior in general terms. For example, if a student engages in a heated discussion with another student and steps over the line, a quick post to remind everyone to conform to the netiquette policies you’ve adopted and to refrain from personal attacks will send a clear message that the conduct is unacceptable without engaging the student in public. A private e-mail to the student will reinforce expectations.

- **Show that you are listening.** Even when a student is combative, showing that you are listening and understand his or her concerns can go a long way to defusing potential conflict. Active listening techniques like acknowledging the student’s concerns and restating them will often help alleviate the student’s anger or frustration. Many times, conflict is the result of miscommunication, and offering students the chance to enter back into a civil dialogue with you will resolve the conflict.

- **Remain professional.** Use a friendly, professional tone in all correspondence. Don’t engage in rebutting personal attacks; do respond to specific course related concerns.

- **Offer choices.** Help students explore their options. If a student is angry about recent grades, help her explore options for additional help—tutoring services, online study groups, a change in study habits—without capitulating to demands that fair grades be altered.

- **Keep a record of all correspondence and keep your Teaching Group Leader informed.** As soon as a student becomes combative or breaks with the code of conduct that you have established for your class, keep a record of all online and e-mail correspondence and inform your teaching group leader of the situation. Make copies of any offensive discussion board posts before deleting them.
• **Use campus resources.** If you find you cannot resolve the conflict, do not continue to engage the student further. Contact your teaching group leader. The student may need to be removed from the class and/or referred to the Honor Code Office.

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**Building Community**

Identify specific ways to create online communities that enhance student learning and add a social dimension to class that strengthens student engagement and improves collaboration.

Questions to consider:

- How can instructors effectively use technology to create a sense of community in their online classrooms?
- What strategies can an online instructor use to help students feel more connection with their classmates and instructor?
- How can an effective online community facilitate learning beyond the concepts studied in class?

An important aspect of online course facilitation is building and maintaining a strong community where students feel comfortable contributing and where testimonies can be nurtured and strengthened. There is no substitute for a strong online presence that welcomes and nurtures student involvement and fosters ongoing collaboration and learning. Strong online communities encourage the type of active learning described by Elder David A. Bednar:

> Are you and I agents who act and seek learning by faith, or are we waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are the students we serve acting and seeking to learn by faith, or are they waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are you and I encouraging and helping those whom we serve to seek learning by faith? You and I and our students are to be anxiously engaged in asking, seeking, and knocking (David A. Bednar, Address to CES Religious Educators, February 2, 2006)

Creating community in an online classroom is not an easy task, but an instructor who uses the announcement, discussion board, feedback, and email tools can create an environment that doesn’t simply educate but also enhances students’ experiences.

**Build Community from the Beginning**

- **Set the tone for the course in your pre-semester email.** Introduce your course in an inviting way. A friendly welcome that communicates your interest in the course and your concern for students opens the door for further contact and invites ongoing communication.
• Think about the information provided in your instructor profile or opening podcast. While you want to maintain a professional tone, don’t hesitate to share some general points of interest. You may not feel comfortable sharing specific information about your family, but information about hobbies, specific aspects of your field that interest you, or a favorite quote or scripture passage can build a solid foundation for ongoing interpersonal relationships.

• Use the “get-to-know you” exercises to meet students. Most courses include an ice-breaker activity that allows students to introduce themselves to each other. Participate actively in this activity, and then draw on this first contact information as you respond to future e-mails or provide feedback.

Maintain Consistent Contact
If you would like your relationship with students to extend beyond grading their assignments, take the time to provide direct, individual contact.

• Contribute consistently to course discussions. Students will follow your lead. Set expectations for discussion participation by modeling the kind of participation you would like to see from the students. Participate actively and then encourage students to follow your lead.

• Enhance the contact with students with weekly announcements. The announcements are the first communication students have with instructors when they access I-Learn. Use this opportunity to provide students with new opportunities to connect to their classmates and the course content. Post links to news articles or examples of student excellence. Point students to helpful resources or fun commentaries on current course content. Make the most of this initial contact to build and strengthen your online community.

• Initiate regular contact to build quality relationships. Initiate contact more than once a semester by sending each student an e-mail, perhaps at the beginning of the semester, mid-semester, and at the end of the semester for closure. Use information provided in ice-breaking activities to make these e-mails personal. Think about the specific student behind the e-mail address.

• Make contact count. Contact is limited in an online setting, so each interaction with a student is important. Friendly, professional communication, whether in the Notes from the Instructor, the office hour visits, routine e-mails, or discussion board posts set the tone and model relationships for students.

• Strengthen class unity and reinforce effective collaboration. You can help student relationships to grow by encouraging effective collaboration. You may want to invite a group to meet with you during regular office hours to make connections or touch bases on a difficult project. You can
offer extra credit to groups who complete small “fun” projects—like making contact via a text message chain or meeting using Skype, virtual classrooms, or other means—tasks that build relationships in the group and facilitate ongoing effective collaboration without taking a great deal of time. In addition, you can reinforce effective collaboration by using discussion boards and announcements to point out what certain groups are doing well. This fosters a sense of unity and accomplishment, and gives other groups ideas on how to be successful.

Add a Social Dimension
Adding a social dimension to class provides extra incentive for students to come and learn.

- **Build relationships.** Encourage students to use the general discussion board to strengthen the online community. Let them know that they can post wedding announcements, news articles related to the subject, questions, and study group requests. Work to mimic the social atmosphere that exists in a face-to-face class before and after class when students build relationships.

- **Throw virtual parties for students with important events.** These events need not be synchronous, but hold a virtual baby shower, wedding shower, or mission call announcement for students in the class who want to share with others in the community. Students can post virtual gifts, set up decorations, or make virtual refreshments for others with an important event. You can open a thread for such events on the course’s main discussion board and invite students to participate.

- **Try a “stump the teacher” activity to encourage participation in course discussions.** Start a new thread and ask students to post questions relating to the week’s course content for the instructor to answer with the goal of “stumping” the teacher. This game show element brings students to the discussion board often.

- **Personalize your course.** Each instructor will have a “Notes from the Instructor” space in each weekly lesson folder to interact with students. Think about ways you can use this space to enhance the subject matter by adding a community element. For example, an online art class may have a “gallery” of brilliant student work. A religion class might use the community discussion board for a different student to post a devotional thought each day.
Additional Resources:
- Teach One Another Overview
- Developing Inspired Questions
- Student and campus photo galleries to help you learn more about BYU and its students
  [http://beta.byui.edu/image-gallery-index](http://beta.byui.edu/image-gallery-index)

Additional Activities:
- Review your welcoming e-mail, opening podcast, or instructor profile. What image does this convey? How does that image foster a sense of community in your course?
- Think about a specific way to enrich your subject matter by adding a community element. How do you want to enhance the student experience in your class?
Instructor Standard IV: Timely Feedback

Instructors post grades within seven days of the assignment submission and provide appropriate, substantive feedback to individuals, classes, and administrators.

Questions to consider:
- How can instructors offer substantive feedback on student work in large classes or across multiple assignments?
- What strategies are most effective in helping instructors strike a balance between students’ need for feedback and their own limited time and resources?

With feedback, timing is everything. Because students have become accustomed to immediate online response or perhaps because they may feel more isolated and insecure without face-to-face contact, online students crave prompt, helpful feedback.

Much as instructors don’t know if the online students have questions unless they communicate those questions in a discussion board post or e-mail message, online students don’t know if the instructor has reviewed assignments or seen their work unless he or she offers some type of feedback. Without that feedback, students may well disengage from the course.

This need for timely feedback poses a challenge in the online classroom because instructors often must respond to multiple student tasks each week. How does an online instructor balance the need for prompt feedback with limited time and resources?

Following are three principles for providing timely, substantive feedback: Remembering the One, Varying Feedback Strategies, and Offering Selective Feedback.
Remember the One

Demonstrate kindness and respect when responding to student work.

Feedback is always personal to the one receiving it. It’s often easy to lose sight of the person behind the product, particularly when faced with a virtual pile of student work to assess. John C. Bean, who teaches writing across the curriculum workshops and is the author of Engaging Ideas uses the following quote from William Zinsser in his writing workshops: “The writing teacher’s ministry is not just to the words but to the person who wrote the words” (239).

Though Bean works with writing, the principle is universal. We can’t lose sight of the individuals we teach. In previous units, we have discussed how easy it is to be misinterpreted. Here are some tips for building students through feedback.

- **Accentuate the positive.** While it’s natural to assume that we need to point out errors in order for students to improve, the opposite is often true. I have a colleague who only writes positive comments on writing assignments. At first, I wondered how students could possibly improve if they were unaware of the weaknesses in their writing. Yet his positive comments actually encourage students to bring all their writing to that higher level. He sets their sights high, and they rise to meet the challenge. Now while it may not be practical to adopt my colleague’s approach, it is a good practice to offer more positive comments than negative. Another colleague, drawing on her recent studies in interpersonal communications, suggests reversing the usual order of feedback. Whereas she once made several positive comments and then ended with suggestions for change, she now begins with suggested improvements and ends with several positive comments. Simply shifting the emphasis has had a significant impact in the way her students perceive her feedback.

- **Be selective.** When we’re in the mode of identifying and correcting errors, we value thoroughness—we want to identify all the errors. But experienced instructors recognize that most of us can only focus on one or two key suggestions for improvement at a time. The impetus is well-intentioned. We want to be helpful—to identify any impediment to student progress—but too much feedback can be as damaging as too little. One or two specific comments that help students focus on what is most significant will often lead to far greater improvement than a comprehensive list of all errors.
• **Be Kind.** We may have seen an error repeatedly—perhaps a dozen times in the last half hour of grading—but it’s the first for each student. Some students may be facing challenges away from the classroom that prevent them from doing their best work or leave them particularly vulnerable to unkind words or criticism. While we can’t lower course standards or alter grades based on personal circumstance, we can be kind and respectful. We can address students by name, assume they are doing their best, and reach out to strengthen and lift them. One online instructor keeps a copy of the course photo directory posted in her work area to remind her of the individuals behind all the names in her course.

**Vary Feedback Strategies**

Employ a mix of feedback strategies that can save time while offering substantive feedback for students.

With upwards of sixty students in a course, just keeping up with class discussions and e-mail correspondence can be difficult. How can busy instructors provide the feedback students need?

One answer may be to vary feedback strategies. We will review four alternatives to individual feedback that save instructors time while offering students valuable feedback.

• **Use Class-Wide Feedback.** Many instructors do this naturally in face-to-face classrooms but neglect it in an online setting when it may seem more natural to interact with each student individually. Class-wide feedback allows instructors to identify trends in student performance and offer feedback designed to strengthen the class as a whole. This approach has the benefit of reaching a large number of students and is often less threatening than individual feedback. Students have the chance to see their own work in the context of the performance of the class as a whole.

Here are four ways online instructors might use this type of feedback:

1) **Class-Wide Announcement.** Instructors can use a class-wide announcement to review a recent exam or project, identifying areas that need improvement across the entire class while offering specific praise. Keep in mind, however, that feedback posted in an announcement should be brief. If you find you want to offer in-depth feedback, use one of the other strategies.

2) **Model Feedback.** This is a strategy John C. Bean suggests. Identify an excellent student example and, with the student’s permission, share it with the rest of the class. Point out what makes the model assignment effective and use positive feedback to reinforce key principles.
3) **Narrated PowerPoint or Screencast.** This approach is particularly helpful if you are teaching a discipline that lends itself to more visual explication. For example, rather than posting individual comments in a math exam to help students improve, you might opt to post two or three problems that most students found difficult in a PowerPoint presentation and narrate a brief explanation that provides the necessary feedback. Or, you may opt to use screen capturing software like Jing to record your work as you work through the sample problems. While the initial presentation may take time to prepare, it can be adapted and reused in successive semesters and provides students with what, for many, is a more effective form of feedback.

4) **Podcast Response.** Share class-wide feedback in a podcast. A podcast allows students to hear your voice, and some instructors find they can offer much more focused, substantive feedback in a recorded podcast than in written comments.

- **Use Rubrics or Grading Scales.** Rubrics or grading scales identify the criteria instructors will use to evaluate an assignment. Analytic rubrics assign a score or point value to each grading criterion while holistic rubrics look at the quality of the work as a whole, generating a general description for different levels of execution. Some grading scales reflect specific requirements unique to an assignment while others identify key characteristics shared by all assignments of that type. Grading scales can save instructors a great deal of time because the feedback on the assignment is embedded in the grading criteria.

Many assignments in your courses will include built-in rubrics. If rubrics are not provided for key assignments, you may wish to request them. Work with your teaching group and course improvement council to create rubrics that will be available in all sections of the course. The Rubrics article sited in the resources box at the end of this unit includes sample rubrics for review.

- **Framed Responses.** Using Framed responses (identified as Template feedback in the I-Learn gradebook) works well if you would like to offer more personalized comments but find that many students require the same general feedback. In a framed response, you create feedback that applies to most of the students and then personalize it with specific detail for each individual’s work. The repeated feedback serves as a frame for the individual comments you would like to add, and you can save, adapt, and reuse the framed responses.
Online instructors can’t respond to each student activity or assignment with lengthy, personalized feedback. But even if they could, it would be unwise to do so. Too much feedback can quickly shift the responsibility for learning from the student to the instructor. Using a variety of feedback strategies can save time while still offering students the guidance they need.

**Offer Selective Feedback**

Manage how and when students receive feedback.

While students often see feedback as a justification for grades, it’s actually a powerful tool that informs all aspects of the learning process.

**Separate Feedback from Grades.** One way to emphasize the role of feedback in improving performance is to separate feedback from the grade. So, for example, students might receive scores on their exams, but rather than embedding feedback in response to an exam—which will be interpreted as a justification or explanation for a specific score—instructors can post scores in the grade center and then offer class-wide feedback designed to help students better apply key principles. Removed from the grade, the feedback becomes a means to improve rather than an explanation for missing points.

**Be Selective.** Provide the feedback that will most benefit students. During any given week, a student might complete three or four different tasks. As an example, in one week students might participate in small group discussions, post an entry in a journal, take a lesson quiz, and submit a proposal for a research project. While a student might benefit from feedback on all these tasks, focusing on the proposal makes sense. Instructors can offer feedback at this stage that can have an impact on future performance.

**Manage Students.** Clearly communicate what type of feedback students can expect. Drawing on the previous example, letting students know you will be participating in the discussion, that you will post feedback in the gradebook on the proposal, and that you will offer some general feedback on their quiz results in the class-wide announcement will help manage their expectations. It also helps them recognize and value different types of feedback.

Students do need feedback each week, but they don’t need individual feedback on every task they complete. Our hope is that the strategies we have reviewed here will offer several options for providing students with timely, substantive feedback while allowing you to manage your time and resources efficiently.
Additional Resources:

- Giving Students Feedback
- Rubrics

Additional Activities:

- Review your course. What types of assignments and activities will students engage regularly? What feedback strategies can you use to make the course load more manageable?
- Identify an assignment in your course that will take considerable time to grade and create a strategy to manage the feedback.
Instructor Standard V: Instructional Development

Instructors participate in teaching groups, share insights, improve course facilitation and time management skills, submit weekly reports, and regularly reflect on and submit suggestions for their courses.

Questions
- What can I do to ensure I continue to develop and improve my skills as an online instructor?
- What are my most valuable resources to help in my ongoing professional development?

Being an online instructor requires flexibility. With the rapid changes in the field itself, and the ever-evolving nature of the technology surrounding it, it is imperative that a BYU-Idaho online instructor maintain the attitude that there is always more to learn. It is important that online faculty, just like traditional faculty, participate in ongoing faculty development activities to ensure that their teaching practices and skills remain current and effective.

Palloff and Pratt note, “training should not be a one-shot experience but should be ongoing” (The Effective Online Instructor 9); they also assert that, “faculty development works. It assists faculty in making changes in their beliefs and attitudes about learning, approach to teaching and learning, as well as the techniques involved with teaching and learning” (46).

Instructional Development Program

Online instructors at BYU-Idaho participate in an ongoing instructional development program to improve their facilitation skills and best practices.
Now that you have finished the Certification course, you will continue to build on the knowledge that you have gained from your own experience and from this training; you will continue to participate in meaningful learning situations; and you will set goals and make plans for your ongoing development.

**BYU-Idaho Resources**

To this point, we have focused heavily on inspired learning and teaching in the context of the Framework, Learning Model, and Instructor Standards. Your ongoing development will be based on all of the principles of the Institutional Framework, including The Spirit of Ricks, disciple Preparation, and leadership Development. You will also continue to explore and develop your understanding of the BYU-Idaho Mission, Learning Model, and other relevant resources.

**Teaching Groups, Community, and Training**

Additionally, your Teaching Group and Teaching Group Leader will become increasingly valuable resources as you are mentored and lead through your continued professional development. There will also be numerous other opportunities provided by the Home Office to help you advance your skills. A few examples of this ongoing training include New Instructor Orientation, the BYU-Idaho Online Community website, regular brown bag seminars, department trainings, faculty conferences, online tutorials, and synchronous Q&A sessions.

If there is anything we can do to help you improve your facilitation strategies and better meet the needs of your students please let us know. We thank you for what you do everyday to support the mission of this great University, and we hope you are looking forward to the opportunities that await you as a BYU-Idaho online instructor.