



## Tips for Managing Your Time



### General

- **Post an abbreviated course outline online.** The Online Courses Website for Porterville College lists course outlines for the online classes offered each semester. These outlines are only as good as the information provided to the Online Courses site editor. By including the pertinent information for your class and updating it when necessary, students can determine, before enrolling, if your class meets their needs. It saves you time by helping to ensure that your class is filled with students who are prepared for what you will require.
- **Cap enrollment higher than the number you expect to finish.** Attrition is a fact of life in college classes, and online classes generally have a little higher attrition rate than traditional classes. If you don't set your enrollment cap a little higher than you normally would, then you will most likely end up letting students add your class after the start of the semester. This wastes valuable time for you and the students, so try to avoid late adds.
- **Be consistent with start and stop times.** Starting and ending tasks on the same day-of-week and time will help you and students stay organized and will save time.
- **Be consistent in where you place similar types of content.** Again it will save you and the students time by knowing, instinctively, where to look for certain types of information.
- **Encourage students to take the online orientation.** Direct your students to the orientation on the PC Online Courses Website during the first week of the semester. You can reinforce this by including an Orientation Quiz (ask Sarah for the file).
- **Define your time limits.** Communicate clearly to students your response time on the various types of communication (assignments graded, tests & quizzes graded, discussions graded, private messages answered, "ask the instructor" forum responded to, etc.)
- **Include a real-time question and answer period.** Plan and announce to students a regular time when you will be online to answer questions. You might do this only early on in the course, when the questions are more numerous or you may extend it through the entire semester. This should not be "extra" time that you set aside but rather a time when you know you will be at the computer anyway (say 30 minutes between classes, or 1 hour prep-time before classes).
- **Review and revise your course.** After teaching the course one-semester take the time to review it. Note instructions that weren't clear and revise your instructions. Note the timing of announcements and the student response to them. Use this to plan out your announcements for the next term. Making this schedule ahead of time and sticking to it, will help avoid confusion later.
- **Log in every day, or as often as possible.** It is much easier to handle the course load if done in small chunks rather than in large ones. By checking in every day, you may also help to address an issue that is small at the present time, but if left un-checked for a day or two might grow into a bigger problem.
- **Don't get sidetracked by tech support issues.** Direct students to other resources available to them for tech support. (e.g. Direct students to the Online Help Desk for

tech support, or designate a forum in your Discussion board for tech support and either have students help each other or Sarah to monitor it.)

- **Be strict with deadlines and missed assignments.** If you've never taught online before, you may want to wait to implement this after teaching the course online for at least one semester. Otherwise, experienced online instructors should have a good gauge for how much time to allow for assignments, tests and discussions. Once you have your course due dates decided, be firm with them. It only causes you more headaches and extra time to extend a deadline or allow a make-up. Be very clear about your firm deadlines in your syllabus and also with the instructions on your assignments. Some instructors structure in one throw-away assignment or quiz to allow for one that a student might miss or bomb-out on.

## ***Discussions***

- **Incorporate an early opening discussion.** Try to always include an early opening discussion, such as an introduction discussion. Make it fun and inviting, with your own post to model and start things off. This gives the students an opportunity to use the Discussion board tools in a non-threatening way early in the course.
- **Communicate and enforce deadlines.** Be clear about deadlines for posting and be strict about them.
- **Include special ongoing forums.** Consider including these separate forums (names could be different, but you get the idea): Student Lounge, Ask the Instructor, Technical Help. For the latter, if you are not very comfortable with technology you can encourage students to respond to questions here and/or invite Sarah to monitor that forum in the early weeks.
- **Don't respond to every discussion posting.** Monitor the discussions, yes, but only jump in when appropriate (examples: You feel an encouraging word is appropriate, a redirection is necessary, etc ). Let students carry on the majority of the conversation. If you have provided good modeling with discussion rules, prior to letting them loose, they should be able to carry on a productive discussion for the majority of the discussion length.
- **Use the expertise of others.** Bring in a guest lecturer who leads a discussion.
- **Reward concise on-target posts.** If possible, strongly encourage students to keep posts short. Perhaps recommending posts not exceed 350 words.
- **Reuse your comments and summarizations.** Save some "canned" comments and summarizations from term-to-term. You can then reuse them the next time you teach that course, with only perhaps a little tweaking.

## ***Assignments***

- **Balance the assignment load.** If possible, try to space out the assignments so that you and the students are not inundated at one time with a heavy assignment load.
- **Try group activities.** Assigning group activities can help free up your time by giving you less to grade. They also encourage community building, help prepare students for real-world work, and encourage students to help each other. You can even have the other students grade the products of other groups. You will have to develop a clear rubric for them to use and explain how to use it.

## ***Modules/Lectures/Weeks***

- **Write concisely.** It is helpful to you and the students to keep your lectures as concise as possible.
- **Make use of content available on the Internet.** Direct students to read information from a Website that you have verified for accuracy and pertinence. Try and send them to the exact page, rather than to the home page and forcing the student to hunt for the information you wanted them to see. It is also a good idea to place the content at the appropriate time for learning that part of your material. Be prepared with a plan B, however, if the Web content moves or becomes unavailable.

## ***Tests & Quizzes***

- **Use the self-grading feature of your course site's testing tool.** This may seem obvious, but it is occasionally overlooked. If assessing students by use of objective questions fits with your content and teaching style, the self-grading feature of testing tools helps you and the students. If you're using it as a non-graded self-check, it helps the students to better focus their study efforts. You can also use them as graded assessments. Most testing tools allow you to draw your questions from a pool, set a time-limit, and other actions to make the test a little more secure. Good objective tests take time to prepare, but you save time in the long run because you won't have to grade them.
- **Offer an ungraded practice quiz.** You can create a practice quiz that mimics the way you structure your regular quizzes or exams. Strongly encourage your students to use this to test their system and their understanding of how the testing features work. If you back this up with strict adherence to no makeup quizzes or exams, your students will hopefully use this opportunity to become familiar with the tool and thus minimize problems on high stakes exams.
- **Encourage students to not wait until the last minute to take the tests or quizzes.** Students who wait until the last minute run a greater risk of not being able to submit their quiz or test, due to any number of reasons. By encouraging them to tackle the test or quiz early, you reduce the number of students who will come to you after the test or quiz due date with an excuse about why they didn't get it turned in. Hopefully you are also enforcing your deadlines and can just deflect those few students with a reference back to your policies.