

## Hey Friend, Can You Spare Me Some Time? How Converting Classes Takes *More* Time

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*Abstract: Transitioning from a face-to-face to a fully online class was a huge, time-consuming challenge. I would now like to share with you what I learned, how I did it, and how to find yourself some time.*

*Keywords: time, online, online learning, instructional design, backward design, Canvas, class, classroom.*

This is the 50th time I have started this essay. It is an essay about the Herculean and time-consuming effort involved in putting a course online. Yet, every time I put fingers to the keyboard the words would not come out. I could not get to the heart of the matter. I started to explain my process for converting my fully face-to-face class to a fully online class. Was following strict instructional design (also known as backward course design) rules what ate all my time, keeping me up at night even on weekends? Was it figuring out the intricacies of Canvas, my university's learning management system, that left me sleepless? Was adapting my class to a new Canvas template causing time to slip through my fingers and thus push back deadlines?

Then the lightbulb of knowledge appeared above my head and I had my answer. Yes, redesigning a class takes time. The big reason though, was my emotional center, my ego, my feelings about my class. How I felt about my class and the changes is what stretched out my conversion time. Let me share with you my journey so hopefully you can gain some time.

First let us begin by acknowledging that "teaching often is listed as one of the most stressful professions" (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Even the American Institute of Stress agrees (Busby, 2019). So, we teachers, college-level instructors, should be used to stress, right? Sure, bring it on, we can handle stress.

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) looked at us and said, "Challenge accepted."

In spring 2020, Indiana University instructors were asked to move their classes all online for the second half of the semester. (Remember? Thanks, COVID-19. *Not.*) Although I was sad to leave my students there was a part of me that was thrilled. I had wanted to put my class online for a while. Like all of us I made some quick adaptations and Microcomputer Applications in Kinesiology was up and running. Thanks to my class being hybrid, class met both online and in face to face, I had taped lectures ready to go. Plus, my class had a website and Canvas sections that students were already using.

When the big moment came and I was asked to convert my face-to-face class to a fully asynchronous online class for summer 2020, I thought "Hooray! This is great! This will take no time at all! I love being online. I was born for the digital age!"

I have spent years extolling the virtues of distance education. I have designed and delivered online classes for over a decade. I have even helped others create online content. To make it even sweeter, my class teaches students how to use and learn about technology. This was perfect. I figured transitioning to fully online would take maybe a day. At the most a week. No time at all. So easy!

Go ahead, laugh.

No. Laugh. At me. I am laughing at me.

I was so wrong.

Transitioning my face-to-face class to fully online nearly broke me. I realized at the end of the first day of redesign that this process required one thing I had not given it: time. No, not time to work—time to mourn.

Let me now share with you my future strategy for putting classes online. This strategy would have saved me time and tears. I think it will help you. It is a three-step process: (1) Take out ego; (2) use a strict instructional design/backward course design calendar; and (3) now mourn. Will these steps overlap? Yes. Should you really give yourself time to mourn? Yes. Trust me.

Step 1: Take out ego. This is in reference to Dame Judi Dench as M speaking to Daniel Craig as Bond in *Casino Royale*. “Take your ego out of the equation,” she says to him (Campbell, 2006). My work life, my professional persona, my ego was involved in my face-to-face class. I enjoyed how it worked and how I worked with students. By putting my class online, I was taking away everything that gave me joy in my profession. I had to stop thinking about myself and I had to think only about the class and the students. I had to tell myself I would find other ways to make connections with my students. I had to recreate the class without reflecting on what I usually did in the past. (Bye-bye, joy-producing part of ego; hello, tears.)

Take your existing class, tell it you are sorry, and start all over again. Seriously. Do not get hung up on how things are or used to be. In short: Good enough is good enough. I put my ego aside and vowed that I would improve this new format later.

On to Step 2: Use strict instructional design/backward course design principles. Quick note: Instructional design was the process I was taught in graduate school for course creation. “In short, instructional design is the process by which learning products and experiences are designed, developed, and delivered. These learning products include online courses, instructional manuals, video tutorials, simulations, etc.” (Instructional Design Central, 2020). It is now called backward course design: “Backward design, also called backward planning or backward mapping, is a process that educators use to design learning experiences and instructional techniques to achieve specific learning goals” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Step 2 also comes with a plan and pointers. These methods are what I used to finally get my class online with the least number of tears.

## **The Plan**

### *Part 1*

Create a strict calendar. A. Strict. Calendar. In other words, whatever time you allot for the work outlined below, do not add more time. This is how you avoid burnout. Make sure you take time to sleep and eat like you usually do. Do not work into the night or give up all of your weekend. Make sure you put in time to live your life or you will experience COVID fatigue.

Begin your calendar with your timeline. How long do you have to convert your class? Or in other words, when does your class have to be up and running for students? For example, if your first day of class is August 16, then the absolute done day is August 15. If you are beginning your work on August 1, that gives you 14 days. Plan what you will do for the class each day. When done, step away. This may sound like simple time management. It is. Use it.

Do not plan to work on that last day! You will need it for mourning, that is, Step 3. Also, do not plan to work 24/7 to get your class completed. Make this quick and simple.

### *Part 2*

Design: Begin by putting only your class goals and objectives on paper and say hello to them again. Use them to determine the structure of your course. Once I had all my goals and objectives in front

of me, I created a class timeline. I grouped the objectives and laid out a plan for the class, starting with basic concepts and skills. I continued building until everything was covered.

Now on paper, by hand or on the computer, lay out your class by topics and/or weeks, linking them to your objectives. Once you have done that, start breaking down each week into projects and/or quizzes. Then get smaller. Start writing out a “workbook” for students. Tell them on paper what you would say to them in the classroom. You will put this workbook online or email it to the students so they can use it. This will lead them through their lessons.

## Pointers

Keep the following pointers in mind to help save your sanity and validate your process:

1. Only need-to-know. Break your class down to what the students absolutely need to know. When face-to-face, I would talk about computer gaming and how it pushed the hardware industry. Too bad. Not necessary information for this class so I cut it out.
2. Build information. What do students have to know each week? What do they need to know the first week of class to (a) survive in your class and learn and (b) survive the online environment? Yes, this is indeed scaffolding and it works: “In particular, scaffolding can improve the quality of learning, including learning outcomes” (Doo, Bonk, & Heo, 2020, p. 74). Indiana University provides an excellent template for Canvas that gives students a Getting Started module. It is the first module by default. If your institution does the same, *use it*. After that, the rest is up to you.
3. Change, if necessary. If you need to change a project, an exam, or the way a class flows to make it work online, do it. Once you resolve yourself to this, making those changes is quicker.
4. Start with easy. The last few weeks of my class are simpler than the first because students are using previously acquired skills. So, I built those classes first.
5. Canvas modules. Love them or hate them, they do work to your advantage. My students were used to them, and modules lay out for students exactly what you want them to do and when you want them to do it. Yes, you really do have that control now. You can break modules down by week or subject. Just be sure that they flow together. I chose to do weeks as that was how I thought of my class and it would help students know what they had to do when.
6. Prepare to learn. Yes, you will now have to figure out Canvas and how to use modules. Take a big breath and make everything as simple as possible *for yourself*. Good rule of thumb: If it is simple for you, it will also be simple for the students.
7. Middle change. Prepare to change in the middle of the class! I had to make updates to my course in the middle of it. I just practiced my above steps and did the work. It turned out for the best.

Big helpful note: Create a syllabus quiz. The syllabus is where you put all your policies and procedures. Make sure students know how to find those by giving them a quiz the first or second week of class. “For many students, there is a major transition between the expectations of their high school teachers and those of their college or university professors” (Raymark & Connor-Greene, 2002, p. 286). The syllabus provides an excellent opportunity to delineate these differences. I know that sounds crazy, but I recalled the questions asked the most by my students and then put those questions in the quiz. When the class was face-to-face, I could easily demonstrate and help them with class

policies and projects. Online I had to familiarize students with my policies and procedures and even Canvas itself. Yes, you might lose instructional time. Do it for both your students and your sanity.

In the end, my summer online class went well. Students performed as well as if they had been in the classroom. This means the class worked and students were able to meet the objectives.

When the work is done, when the class is online, when the students are learning, you can now go and find your ego. And then go to the last part: Mourn.

## **Mourn**

It is now time to mourn. Our lives and realities are so different from what they were even in February. Everything.

In her article “Advice for Faculty Members in a Turbulent Time,” Mindi Thompson said: “As a licensed psychologist and associate professor of counseling psychology, I want to start by saying it is normal to experience a range of emotional reactions” (Thompson, 2020). At first, I was ashamed. I knew my online interactions would be different from face-to-face. My joy in teaching was wrapped up in talking and meeting with students. Now it was gone. I cried.

We teachers spend time in the classroom interacting with our students. We are tuned to their reactions to our words. I looked forward every semester to seeing new faces in my classroom. Yet here I was, creating a whole new course where I would not share physical space with my students. All the cues, all the subtle signals of learning were gone.

So, I gave myself permission to mourn. This much change means needing to mourn. I realize now my exhaustion came from needing to feel sorrow. My class had changed. It would never be the same again. Even when we go back to fully face-to-face, it will not be the same. My online changes made my class better. I can still mourn the passing of the old.

I missed my students. Yes, I got to know them through discussion and emails. However, I love having students come to my office and talk with me and get help and a really good cup of coffee. (I am a coffee snob.) There is a privilege in students sharing their lives with you and when it is gone, it hurts. So dear colleagues, go ahead and cry. Go ahead and mourn. Those students are worth it. We are worth it. Let us share our stories and heal.

It will, I think, save us time.

## **Epilogue**

As I write this, the first week of fall 2020 has ended. This week marks the first time in my life I have had students standing in my optional attendance classroom look at me and say, “Thank you for having class.”

Dear students: Thank you.

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