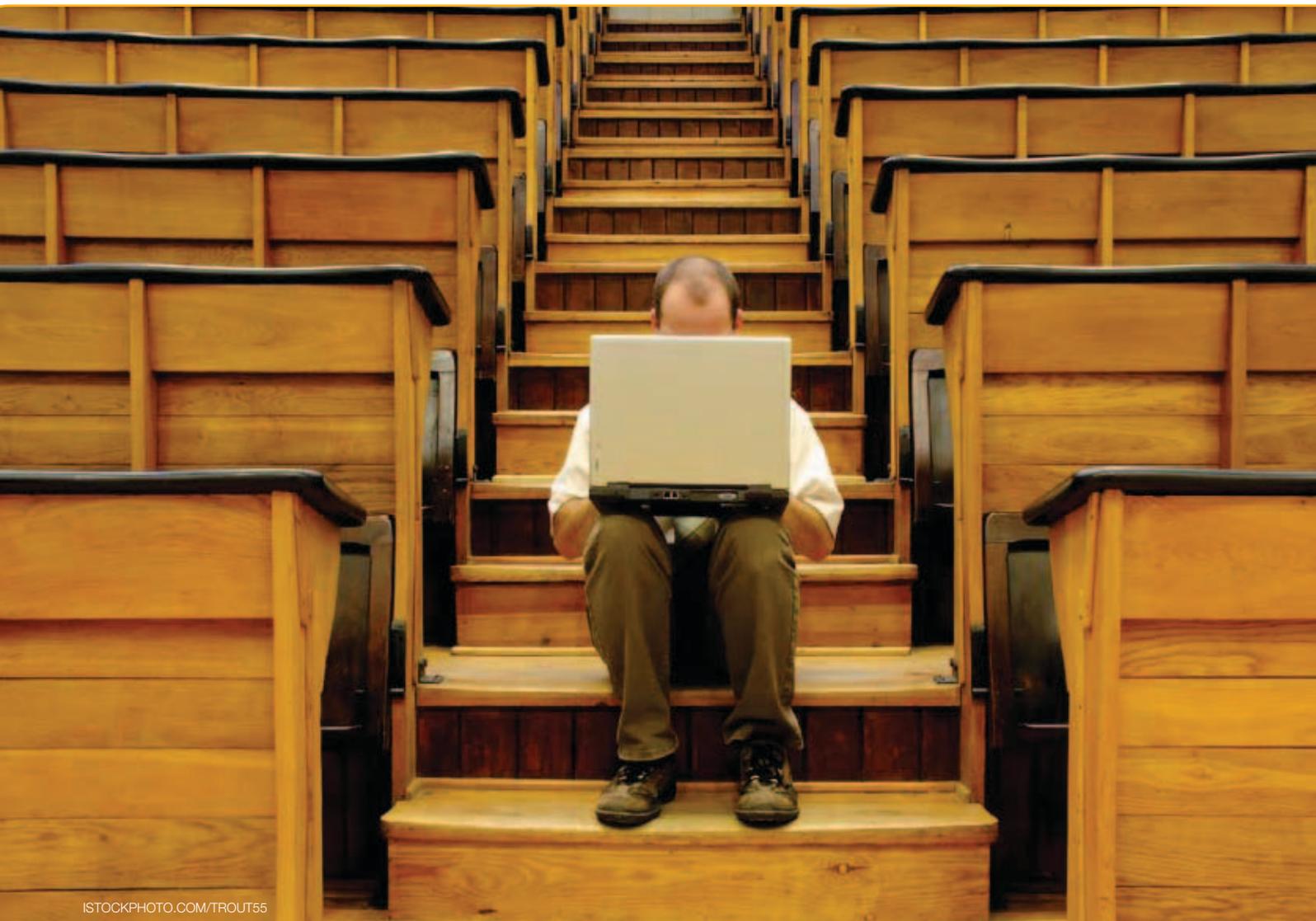


Making the Switch



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Turning Face-to-Face Content into Meaningful Online Courses

Convenience and flexibility have made online courses increasingly popular across the education spectrum, from higher ed to professional development to K-12. (See “How to Become an Online Educator” on page 20.) Of course, that means teachers now have another skill set to master—designing online courses.

If you’re called upon to build an online version of your K-12 or professional development class, the good news is that you don’t have to build an entirely new course from scratch. You’ve already done the hard work of digging up

content for your face-to-face class. Now you just need to format it for the Web, with special attention to how the goals and logistics of a course change when you take it out of the brick-and-mortar classroom.

To get you started, we have drawn up an outline of the basic steps needed to go from your traditional course curriculum, through the logistics of organizing it for the Internet environment and launching the lessons on a workable timeline, to the final goal of an online course that is both rich in content and technically savvy.

Step 1: Know Your CMS

First of all, you need to understand the course management system (CMS) you will be using. Your school district may have purchased a CMS such as Blackboard or WebCT (which has merged with Blackboard). If not, you can use Moodle, an open source CMS with similar functions and features.

Regardless of which system you use, don't worry about learning everything about it. Take time to learn about the features you will be using in your course, especially the grade book, any interactivity components, and the features you will use to deliver and collect assignments.

You should also understand your chosen system's limitations. Online instructor Kim Hunt was able to use the blogging tool in Moodle for the ninth grade language arts class she offers through the West Central Learning Academy, an online public charter school based in Lima, Ohio. But it's not always so easy. For example, your school's version of Blackboard may be missing one or more key features, such as photosharing, blogs, and wikis, if your district decided not to pay for them. Fortunately, you can plan a work-around using free Web 2.0 tools such as Flickr (for photosharing), Google's Blogger, or Wetpaint (for building free Web sites)—unless your district blocks these sites. One site that most schools allow is VoiceThread, a tool for sharing photos and stories.

Step 2: Make the Most of Modules

Once you have a solid understanding of your CMS, you can begin organizing the course content into modules. The modules form the overarching concept and navigational structure of the course, so it's important that their layout is intuitive and makes sense. Concept mapping tools such as Inspiration, Microsoft Word, or even

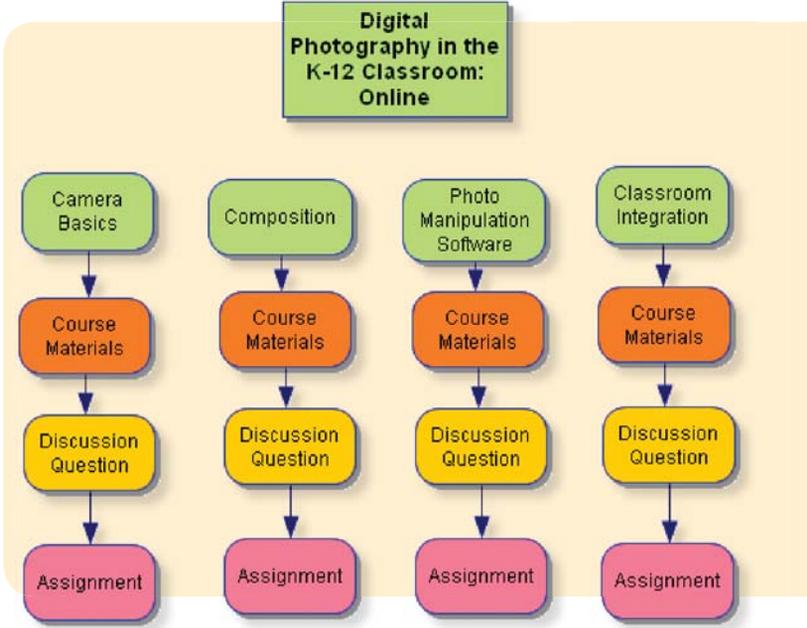
just a pencil and paper can help you create a cognitive map of the course.

Each module should focus on the goals and objectives of the curricula and should be organized around three areas: course materials, discussions, and assignments/activities. Dividing the layout this way keeps the content consistent and helps students better navigate the course.

Include within each module the approximate completion times for course tasks. This will help students gauge the amount of work coming up and plan their time accordingly.

Course materials. You can incorporate Web sites, video clips, podcasts, online articles, textbooks, and lecture notes into the appropriate modules. When gathering these materials, look for ways to differentiate the instruction to make the most of the online environment. You may decide to break up the PowerPoint presentations you used in the original class or to convert their information into short video or audio clips. For example, when students in Hunt's language arts course read *The Odyssey*, they also get to see a video clip about it. TeacherTube is a great source for videos, which are likely to hold most students' attention longer than a page of text can.

Discussion. This is the key to any course, online or face to face. Don't underestimate the importance of the discussion board, as it's your primary



You can use the software program Inspiration to lay out a course's organizational structure.

tool for connecting with your students and establishing the class dialogue. It's also where you can get a sense of how well the students understand key concepts and where the course becomes a learning community.

Each module should include a discussion question based on the content. How you phrase the questions is important. Take your time to formulate them so that they require higher-order thinking. For example, when one of the authors was composing the discussion questions for her online professional development course, Digital Photography in the



Educational videos are an often overlooked source of content that can hold students' attention.



How to Become an Online Educator

Initially, most students flock to online learning programs because of the flexible schedules. But once they try a class or two, many also find that the online learning environment provides deeper interactions with peers and teachers than face-to-face classes.

That may be why online student enrollment grew 19.7% annually between 2002 and 2007, whereas the total higher education student enrollment grew only 1.6% during that period, according to a Sloan Consortium national survey (www.sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/pdf/staying_the_course.pdf).

This growth and demand among students for online instruction is drawing educators to the profession of teaching online, as well. Here are some tips for becoming an online educator:

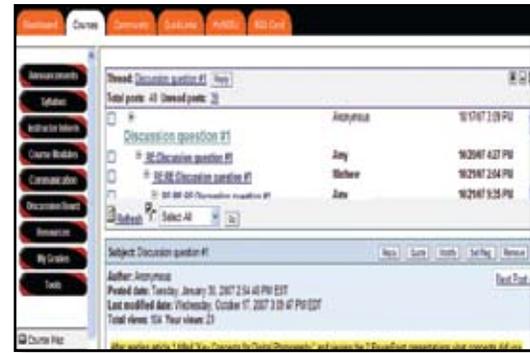
Be a student first. Enroll in an online class to experience online learning firsthand. This will help you determine if you would enjoy being an online teacher and prepare you to better relate to your future students.

Leverage your professional experience. Although educational institutions have various requirements for academic credentials, they're looking for adjunct faculty who can bring real-world experience into the virtual classroom. The combination of a master's degree and tenure in a profession is highly regarded for an online teaching professional.

Create a curriculum vita (CV). Resumes don't work well in academia. A Google search will turn up several examples of CVs, including online courses to help you develop your own.

Network. Participate in online teaching discussion forums to find out who is hiring. One popular choice is Yahoo's OnlineTeachingJobs group (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Online_Adjuncts).

—Chad McAllister, PhD, is an online educator, product development consultant, and instructor for UC Irvine Extension. He is one of the original developers of the university's first online teaching certificate program, *The Business of Teaching Online*.



The discussion board is the heart of your course's online learning community.

K–12 Classroom, she could have simply asked students to regurgitate an assigned article's main points. Instead, she phrased the question like this: "After reading article 1, what concepts did you learn that will help you when incorporating digital photography into your teaching situation? Explain."

Once the dialogue is established, don't be afraid to use the discussion board to motivate the class. Teachable moments often occur in the midst of an online discussion, so be prepared to seize the agenda to take advantage of the situation, just as you would in a regular classroom.

The discussion board is generally a graded portion of the class, so make sure you provide a detailed scoring rubric so students have some sense of their obligations and realize that written responses should consist of complete thoughts. (See "Evaluation Rubric for Participation" on page 21.)

Chat sessions, in contrast, generally have less stringent response criteria but seldom yield the same quality of results. Chats are best for collaboration within work groups rather than for whole-class discussions, as coordinating 20 students' login times and making sense of a chat that size would be difficult. If your CMS allows chat sessions to be archived, you can re-view them later.

Assignments/activities. For clarity, include a checklist of all assignments and their due dates, as students often

Week 10: October 27 - October 31
This week you are responsible for completing ALL of Unit 2, Lesson 1.

Unit 2, Lesson 1

The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts... take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable nature.
 —Marcus Aurelius

Monday

- 2.1.1 The Watsons Ch. 4 cont. 10 pts.
- 2.1.2 Grammar check compound verbs cont. 10 pts.
- 2.1.3 The Odyssey book 6 10 pts.
- 2.1.4 Book 7 The Odyssey summary 10 pts.

Tuesday

- 2.1.5 The Watsons Ch. 5 10 pts.
- 2.1.5 Grammar check nouns can become verbs 10 pts.
- 2.1.7 The Odyssey book 8 summary 10 pts.
- 2.1.8 Book 9 summary

Wednesday

- 2.1.9 The Watsons Ch. 6 10 pts.
- 2.1.10 Vocabulary week 10 13pts.
- 2.1.11 Week 10 vocabulary
- 2.1.12 Grammar check verbs can be nouns 10 pts.

Thursday

Kim Hunt of the West Central Learning Academy separates her language arts course content into daily modules on Moodle. Students can see a list of upcoming topics but can't access a specific assignment until the instructor releases it.

Set up an additional "open" forum where students can ask questions about assignments or share other ideas, because this will

allow you to respond to several questions simultaneously or for students to answer each other's questions.

Collecting assignments can become time intensive, so plan carefully how you will do this. Know your CMS's assignment-collection tools and learn their potential. For example, Blackboard has an assignment manager feature that provides a place to collect assignments and share comments. Hunt uses a similar feature in Moodle for her language arts class. To save time, use e-mail only as a last resort, as student assignments would be mixed in with your personal and professional e-mails. The students' addresses also may not resemble their real names, making searches difficult.

Be aware that files created on different platforms or with different software versions can create problems. Students may have no trouble uploading their assignments to the CMS, but without the right software you could spend a lot of time trying to open them. Define the file formats you accept well in advance.

After you have organized your course into content modules or by week, you can begin setting up the content's availability within the CMS. Most systems have an "availability" feature that allows you to roll out assignments in sequence. Make current assignments available while caching others until it is time to reveal their content. This prevents students from jumping ahead before you deliver the content and hold discussions, so that

miss important information elements in online courses. Put each assignment, along with the rubric, in a PDF and highlight the important parts. This keeps the information organized and allows for easy downloading and printing. Include numerous assignment or activity examples to help students understand what they are expected to do.

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Evaluation Rubric for Participation				
This rubric will be used to assess the quantity and quality of participation in this course. The student is expected to be an active participant throughout the course through assignments, the discussion board, and all modes of communication used throughout the course.				
No revision needed				
Major revision needed				
Minor revision needed				
Does not meet requirement				
10	8	6	0	Exhibits positive, supportive attitude toward course and class members.
5	3	1	0	Assignments reflect work done at a high level.
10	8	6	0	Assignments and activities are completed on time.
20	15	10	0	Complete a minimum of 3 meaningful postings per week to the discussion board. This should include reaction to readings, discussing the topic issue of the week, and sharing information and resources with classmates.
5	3	1	0	Communication is free of spelling and grammatical errors.
Instructor Comments:				

Making your expectations and grading rubrics available at the course's launch will help you and your students avoid the frustration that can result from misunderstandings.



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Teachable moments often occur in the midst of an online discussion, so be prepared to **seize the agenda to take advantage** of the situation, just as you would in a regular classroom.

you can make sure they understand the prerequisite and foundational skills before they try to complete the assignments.

Step 3: Go Live

Contact your students approximately 7–10 days before the course's start date. Set up a face-to-face meeting if possible, or at least send out an e-mail that includes a welcome, a description of the course, your contact information, and the hardware and software requirements. Attach two files to the e-mail—a student information sheet to be returned to you and a list of your expectations for the students.

Be sure to ask students about their technology experience on the information sheet to determine if some need extra help through tutorials, teacher explanations, or videos. Remember that the course should focus on core content and not technology.

The student expectation list will help both you and the students avoid future frustration. For example, students should understand at the outset that online courses are typically more time intensive than face-to-face courses. Also, even though online courses are accessible 24 hours a day, students often think that grades and instructor responses will be immediate. Tell them to expect feedback on assignments and grades within five to seven days of the due date. For student e-mails, you should send short acknowledgments upon receipt, even if you're not able to send full responses immediately.

The West Central Learning Academy covers many of these expectations during a one-week orientation class that every student must complete before participating in an online course. The orientation also familiarizes students with Moodle and the general operation of online courses.

If possible, open your course a few days before the official start date so the students can read the syllabus, look at the navigational structure, and introduce themselves, which will add a human element to the course.

As the instruction proceeds, keep track of ways to improve the course, making note of where things went well and where they didn't, as these insights will come in handy the next time you teach the course. Also, be sure to include an evaluation for the students to complete at the end. This, along with notes, grades, completed assignments, activities, and discussion postings, will help you evaluate your objectives.

Remaking face-to-face course content in an online format is a daunting task for first-time course designers. But with these guidelines, you can create online experiences that are as meaningful as—or perhaps more than—the original course you taught in the classroom.

Resources

Blackboard: www.blackboard.com
Blogger: www.blogger.com/home
Flickr: www.flickr.com
Moodle: <http://moodle.org>
TeacherTube: www.teachertube.com
VoiceThread: <http://voicethread.com>
WebCT: www.blackboard.com/webct
Wetpaint: www.wetpaint.com



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