How I survived teaching my first online course (and actually enjoyed it!)

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My top ten tips . . .

for preparing and teaching your first online course.

A bit of history …

- For the past several years, the University has been encouraging us to offer summer courses.
- Analytical Inquiry (COMP 1101)
  - Meets general education (common curriculum) requirement
  - Online version of this course first offered in Summer 2012
    - Offered as a condensed (5-week) course
    - Delivered via Blackboard

1. Gather your technical resources.

- Where will you host your course?
  - What tools will you use?
  - Don't forget about FERPA.
- Who (if anyone) will provide technical support for you and your students?

- Recommended book: Ko, Susan, and Steven Rossen. *Teaching Online: A Practical Guide, Third Edition.* New York: Routledge, 2010.
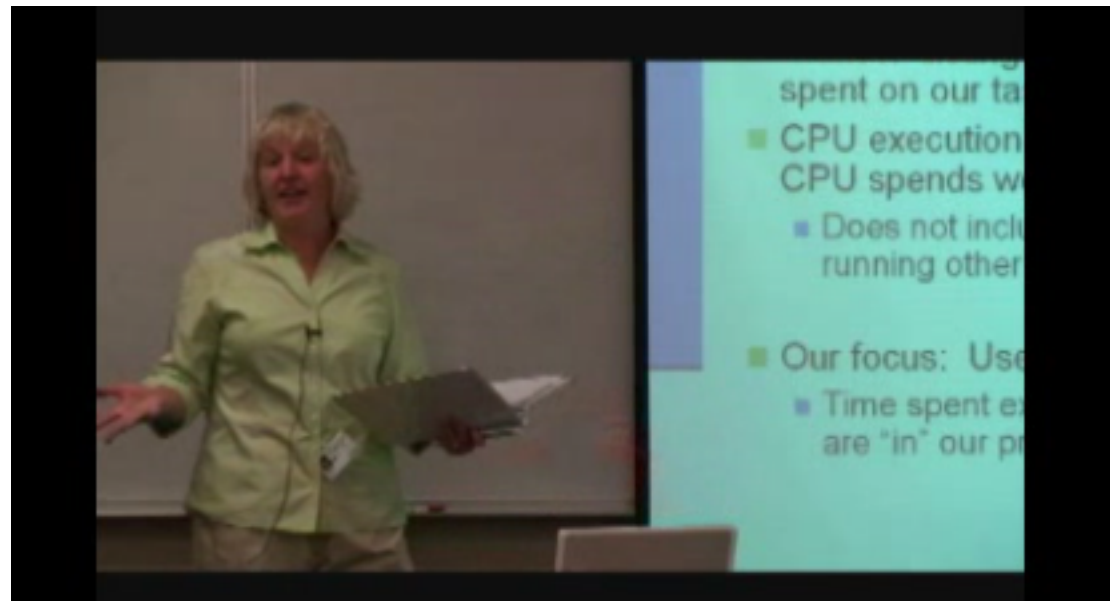
2. Take an online course yourself.

- It helps to experience online learning from the student's perspective.

3. Reflect on your teaching style.

"You will fashion tasks and exercises that emphasize student collaboration and de-emphasize the traditional role of the instructor as the central figure in the pedagogical play."

[Ko and Rossen, 2010]

Discussion Forum Post

1. Start off standing straight, with both arms parallel to your body, at your sides.

2. As soon as you hear the music start, put your right arm at a 45 degree angle to your body, wait one second, and then return it to your side.

3. Wait one more second, then put your left arm at a right degree angle to your body, wait one second, and then return it to your side.

4. Wait one more second, take your right arm, and raise it so that it is perpendicular to your body at a 90 degree angle, wait one second, then return it to your side.

5. Wait another second, take your left arm, and raise it so that it is perpendicular to your body at a 90 degree angle, wait one second, then return it to your side.

6. At the next second, raise your right arm again so that there are about four inches between your right arm and right ear, wait one second, and return it to your side.

7. After one more second, raise your left arm so that there are about four inches between your left arm and left ear, wait one second, and return it to your side.

8. One second later, raise your right arm so that it is straight in the air parallel to your head on the right side, leave it for one second, and return it to your side.

9. Wait one more second, then raise your left arm so that it is straight in the air parallel to your head on the left side, leave it for one second, and return it to your side.

10. Repeat all of the above steps one more time, however replace all of the one second time limits with two seconds instead.

Continuation of Post

Writing this algorithm was difficult for me, because I have a hard time being precise. In order to get someone to understand something with only text, you have to be very particular with your words, and this is not something that I have a lot of practice doing. I do things better when I am able to explain them briefly, but when writing an algorithm most of the time there will not be enough information if you are too brief with your answers. This was also difficult because I had to go back and forth between the video and what I was writing, in order to make sure that I was matching the correct step with the correct place in the song.

Strategies Discussion - Example 1

- When I'm stuck, sometimes I'll try picking a new sprite at random to see what comes up. I'll do it a couple times until I find one that sparks my imagination. I'll also try playing what I have so far a couple times and imagine that I'm seeing it for the first time. What would I want to see next? What's missing? It can help!
  - I really wish that I had this great of an imagination when it comes to this kind of stuff. I think much more "black & white" (if that even makes any sense). I might have to try that out and see if something jumps out at me! Keep it up.

Strategies Discussion – Example 2

- when I get a stuck on designing, usually I would like to check the use guide at first. if I still cannot find out the answer, then I would google it. Sometimes people will make a video on YouTube to describe step by step, and then I can follow the video to finish my design.
  - Videos are really helpful. I like all the ones we've been assigned to watch because it's so easy to follow them exactly. Sometimes when it's written on paper it's much more confusing than when it's being shown to you.
  - Thanks for sharing that , I just replayed the video and solve some problems.

4. Start early!

- Preparation took more time than my face-to-face course
  - Rethinking my approach
  - Learning about and choosing online teaching tools and techniques
  - Designing and setting up the course (and revising the course!)
  - Discovering and creating material that is useful for online learning

5. Create a detailed syllabus.

. . . and find a way to make sure the students actually read the syllabus.

- Parts I added to my face-to-face syllabus
  - Explanation of online format
  - My expectations for the time required to complete this course
  - Instructor availability
  - Classroom etiquette
  - Technical requirements and technical support

6. Engage your students early and often.

- Decide how you want them to participate.
  - Reward them for their participation!
  - Maria H. Andersen. "Can Math and Discussions Boards Compute?" (http://www.maa.org/columns/tech/dec2011-jan2012.html)
- Help them to get acquainted.
- Communicate with them frequently, both as a group and individually.
- Add a "social" aspect to the course.
- Solicit feedback.

The way you award points may vary ...

Table 1. Rates of Participation.

	Unit 1: Review of Precalculus	Unit 2: Limits and Rates of Change	Unit 3: Derivatives
Student-initiated topics	63	50	81
Posts on all topics	227	199	243
Average posts per topic	3.6	4.0	3.9
Median posts per topic	3	4	3
Minimum posts per topic	2	1	1
Maximum posts per topic	13	16	13

- Maria H. Andersen. "Can Math and Discussions Boards Compute?" (http://www.maa.org/columns/tech/dec2011-jan2012.html)

Q & A Discussions in my course

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Number of Topics	10	12	20	19
Total Posts	26	44	51	73
Average Posts per Topic	2.6	3.7	2.6	3.8
Median Posts per Topic	2.5	3	2	3
Minimum Posts per Topic	1	1	1	2
Maximum Posts per Topic	4	7	7	8

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Individual Communication

XXXXX,

I wanted to check in with you because it appears you are falling behind in the course. Lab 3 and programming Project 2 were not uploaded before the deadline. Also Quiz 1 was not completed before the deadline. Remember that all deadlines are in Mountain Time.

Please contact me as soon as possible to let me know what is up.

Thanks.

Susanne

Weekly Feedback Survey

1. Do you like the online learning environment so far? Why or why not?

2. Did you have any problems with any of the items in this week's modules? If so, what were they?

3. How many hours did you spend learning the material and completing this week's assignments?
   - Less than 15
   - 15 - 20
   - 20 - 25
   - More than 25

4. Are there any other comments that you would like to share?

Responses Week 4 – Question 1

Do you like the online learning environment so far? Why or why not?

- I have enjoyed it so far, making a game this week was especially fun.
- This week was really difficult learning the lists and the variables. So, I didn't really like the online learning environment this week.
- There are pros and cons. I like being able to work at my own pace when I feel like it, and receiving feedback online. Sometimes I wish questions could be answered immediately though, which is impossible in the online setting.
- Yes, I love the flexibility that online learning offers.
- For sure! I like the online discussions and working from home has been easy for this class.
- I like the online learning environment because of the time I can set aside.

Responses Week 4 – Question 1

- Yes it has been going well.

- Yes, online learning give you time to think by yourself and if it happened in classroom students will just ask the professor for assistant

- I already adapted the online learning environment. Because I can manage my time flexible.

- I am going to keep putting in the same answer because I love learning online. I love going at my own pace and being able to do what I need to do whenever I want to do it. It is perfect for my learning style!

- My only problem is that other students do not often post in the discussion section, which makes it difficult to participate there.

Responses Week 4 – Question 3

How many hours did you spend learning the material and completing this week's assignments?

Less than 15	1
15-20	4
20-25	6
More than 25	1

7. Think about the layout of your course.

- Strive for a simple, intuitive design.
  - Consider how you group elements of your course.
  - Think about navigation.
- Provide prompts that guide students through the course.

8. Assess your course . . .

and, if possible, receive feedback from colleagues.

- California State University, Chico's Rubric for Online Instruction (http://www.csuchico.edu/roi/)

- Quality Matters Rubric (http://www.qmprogram.org/rubric)

- Assessing Online Facilitation (http://humboldt.edu/aof/aof.htm)

9. Expect the unexpected.

10. Have fun!

Final Project Discussion

- (Student) Is there any way to delete what is stored for the answer to a question? I have a question repeating over and over again until the answer is correct, then it goes to another repeated question with similar answer choices. When I run the script, it keeps the answer in memory for the second question and moves on. Here is a screen shot that will make more sense.

  < screen shot not shown>

  Is there a way to insert something between the repeats to clear the stored answer before it asks the second question?

- (Student) I think I figured out a workaround using an [if/else] block that accomplishes the same thing, but I'm still curious if there is a way to to delete the stored answer. Here's my workaround:

  <screen shot not shown>

- (Instructor) Yes, this looks like it will work. Nice work around! (I did post another suggestion as well.)

- (Instructor) Good question. As far as I know, the only time the blue answer variable changes is when the user replies to a question. However, you could create your own variable and "copy" the answer into it. Something like this should work:

  <screen shot not shown>

  I created the variable called "my answer" and then set it to a space. Does this make sense?

- (Student) This definitely makes sense. I love that there's so many different ways to write similar working scripts!

Questions?