Tips for Teaching Communication Online:
Facilitating Reading, Writing, and Speaking Activities

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(based in part on materials from WAC/CTL folks at the University of Arizona and elsewhere!)

Access this resource directly: http://bit.ly/UWYO-COMonline

As you retool your course for modified online or "Hyflex" delivery, you may want to **reconsider how students' communication activities can help you meet your teaching objectives**:

> Can students create and post videos about course concepts? Can they collaboratively develop and refine a course resource guide (such as answers to a practice test or exam review guide)? Can they be asked to locate and post videos or other materials to help their classmates understand key content? Can you ask students to post summaries/explanations/illustrations of reading, then review and respond to one another's summaries as a way to help them refine their own understanding?

These are just some of the ways that students' informal writing, speaking, and digital communication can support your teaching, rather than feeling like an imposition or extra duty during this potentially stressful transition.

This document provides a range of suggestions, ideas, and links to additional resources that can help you develop, refine, and adapt your communication assignments. **To schedule a consultation or request guidance on a specific idea you're considering, please feel free to reach out to me directly: rick.fisher@uwyo.edu.**

Note: This document is a work in progress and will be updated as new ideas/information is available. If you find information in an area to be inadequate, please reach out for help or to request additional information.

Ideas for Oral Presentations in Digital Environments

In online courses, there are still a variety of options for having students practice and present orally. Below are some relatively low-tech ideas that you may find easy to adapt for your own course setting.

1. *Synchronous Online Presentation* (large group) - Present to the entire class through Zoom.
2. *Synchronous Online Presentation* (small group) - A small group of 4-5 students meet synchronously to present to one another online using Zoom. Sessions can be recorded for you to review at a later time.
3. *Asynchronous Presentation* - Student records a formal presentation (without a live audience) and uploads it to a threaded discussion within WyoCourses, allowing classmates and instructor(s) to watch and comment. This can be done with the student's cellphone or laptop. You can also use the "Guest Recorder" function in VidGrid to create a folder where students can record videos and then upload directly to a folder you create.
4. *Asynchronous Screencast* - Student records and uploads a screencast (which captures screen images as well as voice, using tools such as Jing, Zoom, VidGrid, or Screencast-O-Matic) and can be evaluated asynchronously by instructor and/or classmates. The student can also be asked to post on YouTube to be evaluated by broader audiences.
5. *Synchronous Presentation to Student-Selected Local Audience* - Student selects an audience of their own and plans a time to present to that person/group. Student can record the presentation and submit the recording to the instructor and/or the class for evaluation and feedback.
6. *Synchronous Interview* - Student chooses someone to interview (recording with Zoom or their phone), submits a recording of the interview, a self-assessment and/or an assessment from the interviewee.
7. *Ignite Session* (based on the national *Ignite* speaker series) – Many Ignite samples online can help students discuss, identify, and evaluate a variety of differing presentation approaches/styles. Can be recorded with Jing, Zoom, VidGrid, or Screencast-O-Matic. Students can upload the recording or a link to YouTube or a WyoCourses shell.

Reading & Interacting with Texts

Idea #1: Annotating a Text

Having students annotate a text not only allows you to be certain students are reading, it also invites students to interact on a deeper level with the text. Annotation is an important skill that students can take beyond your class. Individual Annotation or Group Annotation can be done with Google Docs or in Word using the Comment feature. Students can submit annotated assignments via WyoCourses.

Idea #2: Reading Quizzes

These can be created in WyoCourses, Google Forms, or VidGrid, among other applications.

Idea #3: Reading as part of activity

Even better than a basic comprehension quiz is an activity that starts with reading and then engages students in some kind of application related to the reading.

> *Example discussion prompt*: Although people often think first of written language when they think about technical communication, an increasing amount of good technical communication happens through well-designed graphics as well as through smart document design, which helps to quickly indicate relationships among components within a document.
>
> This assignment encourages you to refresh and extend your understanding of good document and graphics design, and to think about HOW you might apply that knowledge. You'll be expected to apply the ideas in these chapters throughout the course.
>
> → Read Chapters 11 and 12 in Markel, and also read this set of excerpts from Williams' The Non-Designer's Design Book. As you read, the questions you should ask yourself are "How much do I already know about good document design?" and "How comfortable am I about selecting and creating the best graphic for a specific purpose and audience?"
> → Read the "Background" information and view the Document 12.1 at the end of Markel, Chapter 12 (pp. 347-348).
> → Given the context provided in the Background, post to the discussion below your explanation about how YOU would go about redesigning Document 12.1. Specifically, explain what kind of document you might design, what specific design features you would incorporate, and what kinds of graphics you might create in order to effectively communicate information to Representative McInness about cell phone use and accident statistics. Aim for 200-400 words in your explanation, and use terms/concepts from Markel and Williams where appropriate.
>
> Grading: 3 points, complete/incomplete, with points deducted for off-target responses. Note that there are a variety of reasonable explanations and designs.

Idea #4. See [Indiana University's excellent list of ideas for engaging students in online classrooms](#).

Many of IU's ideas (e.g., **empty outline, directed paraphrase, fishbowl, buzz groups**) can help you develop discussion posts or other assignments that will deepen students' engagement with their reading.

Using Discussion Posts Successfully

There are a variety of ways to use discussions for supporting writing. Below there are examples for directing online discussion of assigned readings as well as discussion posts focused on planning and sharing writing as a process. You should also consider logistics:

● One way to imitate face-to-face discussion is to have two deadlines for a discussion board: one for the primary post about the assigned reading/text and secondary posts in response to other students' posts (at least 3 responses is a good amount). It is also possible to have students review and refer back to *previous* discussions as another way to generate ongoing conversation among students.

● This [blog post from Educause](#) discusses additional considerations about how to create effective discussion threads, including creating groups and managing your role as facilitator.

Idea #1: Discussions about assigned readings, videos, performances, etc.

Discussion posts can be useful tools to help students engage on a deeper level with various texts. Cengage blog contributor [Tami Strang](#) suggests the following ideas:

1. ***Craft questions that drive students to go beyond "just the facts."*** Though it's important to check students' knowledge of core concepts, those types of questions don't go far in fostering an engaging online discussion. Instead, you'll want to create discussion questions that require analysis and further investigation into the topics you're covering through your readings and lectures. You could also ask students to post their own critical-thinking questions about the assigned reading or viewings. Do stipulate that these questions should require an answer that stretches beyond a simple "yes" or "no"; the questions should be open ended, require short answers, and call for analysis, comparison, or interpretation of the ideas presented.

2. ***Consider how to use your questions as a means of creating community in the class.*** Often, students don't feel connected to their classmates in their online courses because they don't truly have a chance to get to know them. Ideally, the discussion board is a place for them to make those connections! By asking questions that encourage personal responses to the material, as well as a degree of self-disclosure, you can help students develop more of a sense of community… and increased engagement in the class.

3. ***Design activities that encourage students to explore course topics at a deeper level.*** In their chapter on "Technology and Teaching," included in McKeachie's Teaching Tips, Erping Zhu and Matthew Kaplan suggest "…using role plays, simulations, and pros and cons" as a means of increasing engagement and dialogue on your online discussion board (Zhu and Kaplan, 247). You might create a scenario based on an important course concept, and ask each student to discuss that scenario from the perspective of one of the individuals involved in or affected by it. Or, you could link to a journal article, blog post, chapter excerpt, or case study, and ask students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas that the authors proposed, requiring them to support their positions with material gleaned from other readings or your lectures.

Idea #2: Discussions about the writing process

Students can benefit from discussion posts that allow them to discuss the different stages of their writing process as they work towards completing an assignment. Posts can be about planning, researching, drafting, revising, reflecting, etc.

- It helps to allow students to engage in prewriting activities, to gather ideas.

- You can also guide students through a process by asking students to offer brief progress reports on their research and other types of planning. (You can also encourage them to post about questions or struggles they are facing as well--which can help you figure out how to provide follow-up guidance as necessary.)

- If you have students post about their plans and process, consider having their peers comment on the posts (to suggest additional resources and evidence, to present alternative views, etc.)

Making Use of Local Student Support Resources

Many UW resources will be re-tooling to support the shift to all-online teaching this spring. More than ever, you may want to rely on these resources to help you and your students be successful. For example, these resources can share the work of providing feedback as students work through formal/informal assignments.

Writing Center
The Writing Center at UW is fully staffed for online appointments and will provide face-to-face options when possible. Students can either schedule an online synchronous consultation (like a face-to-face consultation, just at a distance) or they can submit their paper and schedule a time for a consultant to review it and email feedback. Students should visit uwyo.edu/writingcenter to register for an account and to schedule a consultation.

Oral Communication Center
The Oral Communication Center offers online appointments. Campus members wanting to make an appointment can click the following link: http://www.uwyo.edu/cojo/occ/. Please check your e-mail during the first five minutes of your scheduled appointment. A zoom link will be sent to your e-mail. Simply click on the link to begin your live consultation session.

Studio Coe
UW Libraries' Studio Coe offers tutoring and technologies for digital communication. Studio Coe's web page provides updated information about service formats, and it provides a list of technologies that you and students can download for free. To learn more, UW community members can also leave call: 307.766.7002.

UW Libraries Research + Instruction
UW Libraries will provide remote consultations as well as extended chat offerings; please email coeref@uwyo.edu or call the Coe Help Desk (307.766.2070) for more information.

Introducing & Scaffolding Writing Assignments

Introducing and scaffolding assignments is an essential part of your students' writing processes. Here are some suggestions on ways to successfully introduce and scaffold assignments when moving your course online.

Idea #1: Adapt your plans

Recognize that the assignment you had planned for your face-to-face class is not going to work in the same way now that you are teaching online. And that is okay! Make adjustments as needed. Be prepared to explain to students why you have made those changes, especially if you had already introduced the assignment previously.

Idea #2: Less is (often) more.

Consider making assignments shorter and more focused. Especially since both you and students may need to spend a lot of time and effort just re-establishing general communication processes, there may be a lot of informal writing that occurs as a side product of the shift to online discussions and communication. If so, you may benefit from shorter, more focused formal assignments--which often allow you to grade more quickly and focus your feedback more narrowly as well.

NOTE: John Bean's excellent chapters about formal writing assignments and informal writing activities provide *dozens* of assignment ideas that can be adapted to nearly any major or course topic.

Idea #3: Provide a space for student questions

Students may benefit from a designated place where they can ask you questions about the assignment and see your answers to other students' questions. If one student has a question, often others will have the same question.

- Have a designated discussion post for the assignment where students can ask you questions. Direct students to this post when introducing the assignment.

- OR share the assignment prompt as a Google Doc with the commenting ability turned on. Have students ask questions by directly commenting on the part of the assignment that is confusing.

Designing and Using Rubrics

Rubrics are an important tool to communicate to students expectations of an assignment, and they also serve as a tool to remind us of what we want to focus on when grading. WyoCourses allows you to create and embed rubrics for single or multiple assignments in your course. See the Canvas help guide (--> "Rubrics") for more information about this feature.

Providing Feedback to Students

Giving feedback to students is essential at point(s) throughout the writing process. WyoCourses' "SpeedGrader" tool provides good options for inserting feedback on student writing, including audio and video feedback. Below is a screen capture that illustrates some of the features of this tool.a

Note: You have more options within SpeedGrader if you ask students to upload a file rather than merely pasting their work into a textbox. Reach out to UW and Canvas resources for help understanding the various assignment submission types.

Implementing Peer Review Activities

Peer review is an essential part of the writing process and can be conducted effectively at a distance. The Peer Review function within WyoCourses can help you facilitate this process.

Idea 1. Consider guidelines that encourage the peer to focus on a few global issues in the writing.

Example: Read the paper. Then reread the paper. If you want to print it out for feedback, that's great. Or if you want to use Microsoft Word's commenting feature, that's great. You're not required to incorporate comments directly into the paper, but it would be generous of you to do so.

TYPE UP at least two paragraphs of feedback (150 words minimum) **that can help the writer revise** his/her work. Provide feedback about <u>ONE or TWO</u> of the following aspects of the paper. (Don't respond to a topic if you don't have any constructive comments to make; be sure to provide specific suggestions about what could make the paper better.)

- **The introduction**. Does the writer convince you that a problem exists and that it is significant? Does the introduction clearly identify the topic of the paper?
- **Thesis**. Is the thesis clear? Does the writer stay focused on the thesis throughout? Does the thesis shift throughout the paper?
- **Evidence**. Do most paragraphs build from concepts in the course readings? Is the evidence explained in a way that helps to support the thesis? Can you think of other quotes/concepts from the readings that would help the writer support his/her thesis?
- **Use of sources**. Is the writer's explanation of quotes/paraphrases sufficient for a reader who is unfamiliar with those essays? Has the writer accurately cited the texts?
- **Structure**. Can you see places where the writer might improve the structure and clarity or the argument? Why would this help?
- **The conclusion**. Can you think of ways that the writer can make the conclusion feel more complete and significant?

Before the beginning of class on Friday, **send your response to the writer <u>and</u> to me** (using WyoCourses Inbox function) so I can review and respond to your feedback. Attach the paper if you're inserted comments into the document itself.

Idea 2. Consider guidelines that encourage peer attention to key expectations of your rubric.

Example: Use the following set of questions to guide your feedback to peer(s). Note any major issues you see.

Basic format
    Does the summary include appropriate header, title, and MLA works-cited entry?
    Is the document single-spaced?
     Is the word count indicated at the end of the summary?

Overall details and purpose
    Does the summary identify the author and title of the article (and, potentially, the source of the article)?
    Does the summary clearly capture the main goal/idea of the text?

Structure
    Does the summary make use of paragraph breaks and topic sentences to help a reader to more quickly recognize and understand the summary's structure?
    Can you "follow" the summary? In other words, does the summary flow, and does that flow accurately reflect the key relationships among ideas in the original article?

Details

Is the summary adequately detailed? Are there places where you feel that you might benefit from more specific detail?

When the writer paraphrases the original article, do they paraphrase clearly and ethically?

Does the summary avoid incorporating too many quotations of the original text? (And, when the writer *does* quote from the original, is it clear why s/he has chosen to quote rather than paraphrase?)

If the summary writer uses quotations, are they integrated correctly?

Where necessary, does the writer provide a clear and accurate definition for jargon or other technical terms?

Objectivity and attribution

Does the summary writer avoid incorporating his/her own opinions about the text?

Does the summary fairly represent the tone, objectives, and details of the original?

To help remind readers that the summary is based on someone else's writing, does the summary incorporate attributive tags throughout? And do those tags use appropriate and specific verbs ("claims" or "builds from" rather than "talks about," for example)?

Additional Resources for Students

You are not the only one in need of support during this transition. Your students will most likely ask you for additional resources that can help them navigate writing online. You can also preemptively share these resources with your students when classes start again.

Idea #1: Online writing handbooks/guides

There are endless websites that provide advice and support for writers, whether students or in general. Let's guide our students towards ones that are reputable and tailored to their writing situations.

- [Purdue OWL](#)
- [UW-Madison Writer's Handbook](#)
- [UNC-Chapel Hill Writing Center Tips and Tools](#)

There are many others available. Use your discretion!

Additional Teaching Resources

- ***Possible Digital Technologies***. To help you think about alternate ways to accomplish your teaching goals. Some may be supported by UW, and some may be temporarily available as companies have increased access due to covid-19.

  - **Website Design Applications**: [Adobe Portfolio](#), [Adobe Spark](#), [Google Sites](#), [Adobe Dreamweaver](#), [Weebly](#), [Wix](#), Squarespace
  - **File Hosting Applications**: [Google Drive](#), Box, [Dropbox](#)
  - **Video Production Applications**: [Adobe Spark](#), [Adobe Premiere](#), [Windows Movie Maker](#), [iMovie](#), [Screencast-o-matic](#), [Jing](#), [TouchCast](#)
  - **Video Hosting Applications**: [YouTube](#), [Vimeo](#), VidGrid

- **Image Editing Applications**: [Adobe Spark](#), [Adobe Photoshop](#), [Google Drawings](#), [Gimp](#), [Photoshop Express](#), [Pixlr,](#) [LunaPic,](#) [PhoXo,](#) [Paint.Net](#)
- **Audio Editing & Publication Applications**: [Audacity](#), [SoundCloud](#), [SpeakPipe](#), [Vocaroo](#), [fotobabble](#), [Podomatic](#), other [Audio/Music Repositories](#)
- **Infographic Applications**: [Piktochart](#), [Venngage](#), [Infogr.am](#), [Readymag](#) ([Example](#)), [Canva](#), [Piktochart](#), [easelly](#), [visually](#), [Plotly](#), Tableau
- **Timelines**: [TimeGlider](#), [TimeToast](#), [Timeline JS](#), [Tiki-Toki](#)
- **MindMaps**: [MS Word Smart Art](#), [MindMeister](#), [Mindomo](#), [Lovely Charts](#), [Maptini](#), [Popplet](#), [Gliffy](#), [Cacoo](#), [Exploratree](#), [Webspiration](#), [SpicyNodes](#), [Coggle](#), [LucidCharts](#)
- **Word Cloud Generators**: [WordClouds](#), [Jason Davies WordClouds](#), [WordSift](#), [Tagxedo](#), [TagCrowd](#), [WordArt](#),
- **URL Shortners**: [Sli.do](#), [Bit.do](#), [bit.ly](#), [tinyurl](#)
- **GIFs**: [GIPHY](#), [GIPHY Gif Maker](#), [Imgur](#), [GIFGIF (MIT Projects)](#)
- **Other fun stuff**: [ThingLink](#), [Google Maps](#), [Glogster](#), [WordSwag](#)

- [Moving online? Just in time!](#) (website from Global Society of Online Literacy Educators with resources on emergency transitions to online teaching)

- [Twitter thread from an experienced online writing instructor](#) (lots of suggestions and quick, easily implementable methods for creating a more engaging space online)

- [Teaching with compassion and focus amid disruption](#) (comprehensive crowdsourced collection of resources across disciplines on how to successfully continue teaching in these unusual circumstances)

- [Screencasting and Screenshots](#) (a lesson plan about helping students use these methods, but also instructive for instructors working with these for the first time)

- [Quality Matters Emergency Remote Instruction Checklist](#).