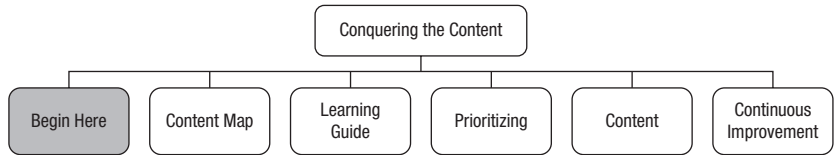


1



BEGIN HERE

PLAY AUDIO
INTRODUCTION



[HTTP://CONQUERINGTHECONTENT.COM/BH/INTRO](http://conqueringthecontent.com/bh/intro)

Lesson Relevance: This lesson will set the stage for development of your online course. We will highlight some of the differences between the face-to-face and online environments, recognize that it is natural to feel uncomfortable when making these alterations to your teaching, highlight the importance of separating course development from course delivery, prepare for future updates to your course, and answer some typical questions of first-time online instructors.

CONQUERING THE CONTENT: A BLUEPRINT FOR ONLINE COURSE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Lesson 1, Begin Here

LEARNING GOALS/OUTCOMES

Begin Here

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Infer qualities of good teachers by describing a teacher who positively influenced you.
- Explain the value that you, as a unique individual, bring to your subject matter.
- Differentiate between the environments of online and face-to-face courses.
- Separate design and development tasks from delivery tasks.
- Recognize the need to design with updating in mind.
- Resolve some issues of first-time online instructors.
- Begin to approach course design from the learner's perspective.
- Document current course organization and structure.

LEARNING RESOURCES

References

- Chickering, A., and Gamson, Z. "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." *AAHE Bulletin*, Mar. 1987, pp. 3–6.
- Felder, R. "Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education." *Engineering Education*, 1988, 78(7), 674–681.
- Merrill, M. "First Principles of Instruction." *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 2002, 50(3), 43–59.

CONTENT

Required Resource

- Smith, R. "Lesson 1, Begin Here." *Conquering the Content: A Blueprint for Online Course Design and Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Activities for This Lesson

- Describe your favorite teacher.
- Identify the value you, as a unique individual, add to a course.
- Select one course on which to work.
- Gather materials for the course that you will place online.
- Identify improvements needed for your current course.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Check Your Understanding

- Express qualities important for good teaching.
- Switch your perspective from teaching to learning.
- Recognize the added value you bring to your learners.

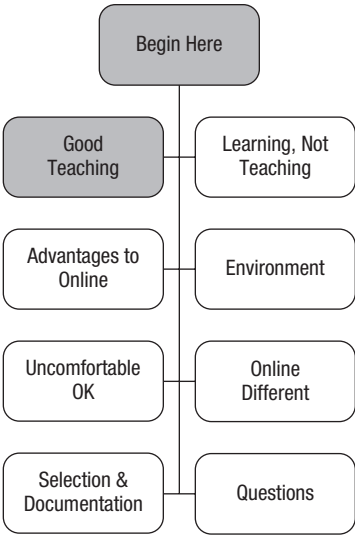
LESSON ASSESSMENT

"Graded" Assessments or Evidence to Proceed

- Materials needed to develop course
- Course improvement ideas

GOOD TEACHING

Why are you involved in education? Who influenced you to invest part of your life’s work in teaching and learning? Is there any particular person who stands out to you as someone who helped shape your decision to be involved in education? As faculty members we usually choose our subject matter because of passion for that topic. The natural world and problem solving intrigue me; therefore, I originally trained as a scientist. What is it that made you select your discipline? Perhaps it was a teacher who took a special interest in you, a class that challenged you, or some particular lesson that touched you at a sensitive time in your life. Typically, a person’s favorite teacher is not one who was his or her easiest teacher; rather the person provided motivation, inspiration, practical application, or something similar. Your learners will likely find these qualities beneficial as well.



ACTION ITEM 1

Think of your favorite teacher from all your years of school—the one who made a positive lasting impression on you.

Using Form 1, document the qualities that stood out about this person.

MY FAVORITE TEACHER

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
Subject this person taught	
The year in school I had this teacher	
The main thing that comes to mind when I think of this teacher	
What he or she did that caught my attention	
The qualities that stand out about his or her teaching	
What I'd like to adopt from this person	

Form available at www.josseybass.com/go/conqueringthecontent

In addition to learning effective practices from those who taught us, we can adopt the teaching principles found to be the most effective, which have been documented by several studies.

You may be familiar with the classic study by Chickering and Gamson (1987), which established seven principles for undergraduate teaching:

- Encourage faculty-to-learner interaction.
- Encourage learner-to-learner interaction.
- Promote active learning.
- Communicate high expectations.
- Facilitate time on task.
- Provide rich, rapid feedback.
- Respect diverse learning.

These same teaching principles hold true whether you are teaching in a face-to-face or an online environment. If you are not familiar with these principles,

I encourage you to find and review this study. Among the many additional articles referencing Chickering and Gamson's original work is Chickering and Ehrmann's "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever" (1996), which provides ideas for using the seven principles in an online course.

Another excellent guide for online courses is Merrill's "First Principles of Instruction" (2002). Most effective learning environments are those that are problem based and involve learners in four distinct phases of learning:

- Activation of prior experience
- Demonstration of skills
- Application of skills
- Integration of these skills into real-world activities

These principles can be applied to instructional design; learning is facilitated when

- Learners are engaged in solving real-world problems.
- Existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge.
- New knowledge is demonstrated to the learner.
- It is applied by the learner.
- It is integrated into the learner's world.

No one would expect an athlete or a musician to perform without hours of practice. Yet much instruction seems to assume that when it comes to cognitive skills, such practice is unnecessary. Merrill (2002) notes that "appropriate practice is the single most neglected aspect of effective instruction" (p. 43).

Your learning experience, research, and your own teaching experience work together to help inform your teaching. It is important to identify the unique contributions you bring to course delivery in the face-to-face environment so that we do not miss the opportunity to incorporate those into your online course. I'm providing some structures for you to use in your online course, and these will be very helpful, but if you incorporate every structural element described in *Conquering the Content* but do not include your unique contributions, your learners will be missing out.

What is it that learners can learn from you that they cannot get from any other source (book, journal article, another teacher)? Whatever you identify here is *highly* important to communicate in your online course. Perhaps it is the way you think through and solve problems, the way you

can add humor to the topic, how you’ve learned to remember important portions of the content, your experiences applying course concepts, or any number of other things that might be distinctive to you. This is what makes you a unique teacher with an important contribution to your learners; we don’t want this to be absent from your online course!

ACTION ITEM 2

Brainstorm for a few minutes about the added value you as a unique individual bring to your course.

FORM 2

MY ADDED VALUE

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
What are some of your unique characteristics that learners benefit from by having you as their instructor?	
What can learners get from you that they cannot get from any other source (book, journal article, Internet, another teacher)?	
How do you think through scenarios or problem-solve that learners would benefit from understanding?	
What about your teaching do students positively comment on?	
What unique experiences do you have that give you insight into your subject matter?	

Form available at www.josseybass.com/go/conqueringthecontent

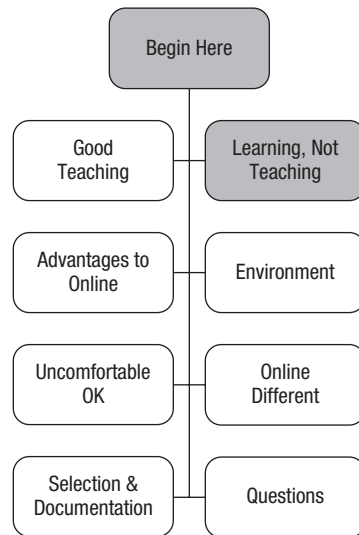
THINK LEARNING, NOT TEACHING

We typically think of our courses as what we will teach. Instead, if you alter your perspective to that of the learners in your course and think, “What do participants need to learn?” you will facilitate the design process tremendously.

Just as you want only enough information to put your course online, detailed steps about how to do the things you need to do, and hints about pitfalls to avoid—all without a bunch of extraneous explanation or background information—your learners want the same kinds of things. Think about how you proceed when you go to the Internet to look up information. You likely search to find

- The best match for the subject at hand. You probably don’t want to read thirty articles. Instead you’d like to find just a few of the facts you need, presented clearly.
- Quick-loading information. If you have to wait more than five or ten seconds for a page to load, you might abandon that site for a different one.
- Clear, precise information with images to confirm you have identified things appropriately or are correctly going about the steps to a new task.
- Checks or verifications along the way in a project so that you don’t get to the end of a sixteen-step process and find out you did something wrong in step 2. You want to know on step 2 whether you are right before proceeding to step 3.
- Few to no time wasters, which are frustrating and preventable.

Learners in your online course will be looking for similar things from you. Learning online is very different from learning in the face-to-face environment; therefore, using exactly what has worked for teaching



materials in the past is not going to be suitable for online teaching. This is a rather tough adjustment for most faculty. We usually teach as we were taught, and those teachers taught us the way they had been taught, and so the cycle has gone for many decades or centuries. As Tony Bates, a prominent authority on distance learning points out, “to change is more work. You’ve got to be trained; you’ve got to learn new things; you’ve got to do things that you’ve never done before” (Awalt, 2007, p. 107).

Today we have powerful tools that have altered the learning environment and offer opportunities to work in new ways. In addition, we are constantly discovering new information about learning and brain research. Moreover, today’s learners have grown up in a visual environment, and they typically process multiple inputs at one time. They may simultaneously be searching the Internet, text messaging, listening to music, and talking on the phone. Then we wonder why they can’t pay attention when they sit in our course and we lecture to (at?) them continuously for fifty minutes. Even television shows are incorporating the option of commenting during the airing of the show, with the comments visible to viewers. This creates an active conversation around the content, which offers a richer experience for viewers. Perhaps we can learn from this example and offer similar options to our students.

Learner-Centered Environment

One of the major advantages to having course materials available online is that it allows repetition of content for those learners who need more than one time through the content to grasp the material. Who said that a degree should be available only to those learners who can “get it” the first time through the content? If learners need to repeat the content seven times to fully comprehend it, and are willing to take the time to go through it seven times, shouldn’t they also have the opportunity for credit?

The learner-centered environment of an online course has a number of facets:

- **Self-selected.** That learners choose when to come into the course and work on the subject matter adds a distinct psychological advantage: they are mentally prepared because they chose to

work on the course materials. Even if it's to avoid something else they don't want to do (laundry, working in someone else's course), they've *chosen* to come to class. In contrast, in a face-to-face course, the learners are required to attend at a specific time. Even if they originally selected this schedule themselves, a given Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. may not be a suitable time for learning, for any number of reasons. By the way, you as a faculty member also get to self-select the moment you go to class in an online course. This can very beneficial to your schedule as well.

- **Time.** Learners may work at the time of day when they are at their best. You may be at your best in the morning; if so, you can develop your course materials in the mornings. Some learners may be at their best at 11:00 p.m. and “come to class” then. Another learner can “come to class” at 2:00 a.m. With everyone working at his or her optimum time of the day, both the course and the participation in the course are more likely to represent the best effort possible, and we therefore get a better learning experience. With content and other course materials online, this information is available around the clock. So even if you are not placing your entire course online, you can provide some online features to aid learners.
- **Place.** Learners can choose a place where they can concentrate well and at their convenience. A learner who is traveling for work or vacation is able to participate in the learning activities regardless of his or her location. This means that learners can keep up with course work much more conveniently than learners limited to the face-to-face environment, who if they have a conflict at, say, 10:00 on Monday, totally miss whatever happens in class. In an online course, the option is still there for learners to get the content even though 10:00 on Monday did not work for them. Many face-to-face instructors are taking advantage of online submission of work. This offers many advantages, including ease of assignment submission, a record of submission, ease of grading, and return of work to learners.

- **Pace.** Online learners can move quickly through content they understand, go slowly through content they do not understand, and repeat sections as needed. Faculty members have always had the difficulty of not reaching all learners. Some learners are left behind, while others are not challenged enough. With an online course, learners can take care of this for themselves. And because materials are already online, there is no extra effort required by the faculty member to meet the individual pacing needs of learners.

Plan for Online from the Beginning

Have you ever had to make a presentation when the equipment was different from what you had been told it would be, or you attended a presentation where the equipment didn't match what the presenter had brought? Maybe the presenter brought materials for a computer and an LCD projector, but the meeting site was prepared for someone with transparencies (previous-century technology). Unless there is a way of transferring information quickly from one format to another or a way to improvise on the fly, the entire exchange of information may be compromised. The same is true if you do not plan your online course as an online course from the beginning. If you've been teaching a face-to-face course for years and show up to an online course with your face-to-face materials, it's like standing in front of a computer and an LCD projector trying to figure out a place from which to transmit your transparencies. There is no such place. Those two modes of communication are not compatible.

In *Learner-Centered Teaching*, Weimer (2002) points out that "the piecemeal addition of new techniques does not transform teaching." Instead, we need to approach change systematically. "Systematic change means change that is planned, prepared, and then implemented according to some process" (p. 185). The course must be planned as an online course from the start. That is why we begin with revisiting goals and learning outcomes in Lesson 1 and brainstorming the best way for learners to achieve those outcomes. With online technology, there are some limitations and freedoms not offered to us when we're teaching by other delivery modes.

Select Technology Based on Pedagogy

Gratuitous use of technology is not impressive to learners. They've seen much better than what we are able to place into a learning management system (LMS), so using a tool just to use it is not helpful. There should be an educational reason for use of the tools in your course. The course content is to be the challenge of the course, not the use of the technology. If there are tools your learners may be unfamiliar with, providing instructions for how to use them is vital.

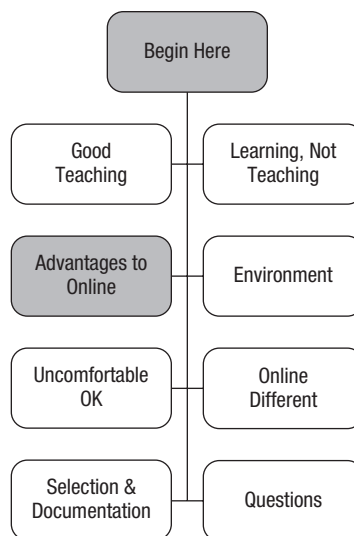
It is also important to time the introduction of new tools in such a way that use of the tool doesn't add to the challenge of the assignment. Remember, we want to keep the content front and center and have the technology as invisible and comfortable as possible. Therefore, if you will plan to use a particular tool for learners to submit a high-stakes assignment, it is better to introduce use of that tool earlier in a low-stakes assignment or in an element with few points associated so that students can gain experience with the submissions process.

During one semester, a faculty member I was working with had learned to use a new tool in the LMS, and she was interested in having the learners use that tool to turn in their final paper. We talked about the way the learners had turned in their other papers throughout the semester, which was through the use of a very different submission method. No additional assignments were due prior to the major final paper. My suggestion was that the learners' stress level was going to be rather high for getting their final paper completed anyway, and introducing a new tool to go along with the assignment itself would cause additional, unnecessary stress. She agreed and waited until the next semester to use the newer tool. In that situation, the technology was not going to be an enhancement, and it was not going to be invisible; it was going to be invasive and disruptive to the learning process. Her conclusion was that although it would be much more efficient for her, it was better for the learners not to have to deal with a new tool at that point in the semester.

ADVANTAGES TO HAVING A COURSE ONLINE

I knew learners would appreciate the convenience of accessing information on their own schedule, the absence of a face-to-face attendance requirement, and the ability to review course content and presentations more than the one time they were presented in the face-to-face environment. However, after my course was online, I realized additional advantages that I had not anticipated. Some of these advantages were due to the advance preparation of the online course, which had to be complete before the semester began. For example:

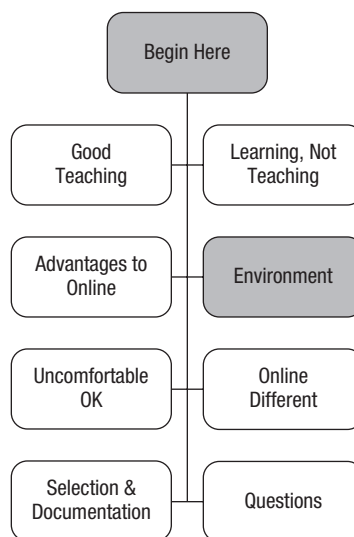
- Learners can hurry through concepts that are familiar to them and go slower through concepts for which they need additional time.
- The online course provided a solid base from which to update my course because everything was documented, and review and update of content was more convenient.
- Static content enabled the learners to provide more meaningful feedback about those aspects and portions of the content where they needed additional explanation to facilitate better understanding.
- The experience of teaching online enabled me to also increase the organization and structure for my face-to-face courses. Learners in my face-to-face courses noticed an improvement in my teaching as I began teaching online.
- Learners in my face-to-face courses benefited from the Learning Guides that I began providing for them after using them in the online environment.
- I knew for certain what the online learners were viewing as magnified images. When we met in the laboratory, in contrast, I was unable to check with each learner on each microscope image.



- It was much easier for me to critique my own course materials online than to critique a videotape of myself presenting those materials.
- With content online, my focus and that of the learners became the content. Rather than standing between my learners and the content (as it seemed in the face-to-face environment), I was now standing beside my learners, and we were all focusing on the content.
- It was easier to incorporate the suggestions from external reviews, because they could review the course material on their own time. The online materials provided a target for review that was impersonal compared to critiques of my face-to-face presentations. Reviewers found it much more comfortable to provide constructive feedback.
- The switch to teaching online meant that my day was more flexible.

ENVIRONMENT

Just as it was best for me to write this book fully accepting the reality that you will not have the opportunity to place your entire course online all at once, it is best for you to develop your course fully accepting that your learners will not have uninterrupted time to work on your online course. It would be ideal if they had a protected hour to work on the course when nothing else was happening, but how many of us have blocks of time with no interruptions? We need to plan our courses with an understanding that learners will have interruptions. If they do not, all the better, but telling them they need to put aside a specific time to work on your course and commit to that time is like expecting learners to have questions for you only during your office hours. We've all experienced the limitations of that plan!



The Online Learner's Environment

Rather than being surrounded by a room full of other learners who are focused on the same subject matter for a period of time, an online learner may be surrounded by any number of circumstances at home. Crying babies have no concern for class time; if they are in distress, now is the time for action. By the same token, ringing phones, toddlers, meal preparation, carpools, work, and other duties often require that learners interrupt their online learning time. Do not underestimate the distractions that a learner may be dealing with at home. These distractions will be competing with your course content for attention. Environmental factors have a strong impact on learner concentration levels for online courses.

The Two-Minute Test

I was fortunate to be in the audience recently for a learner panel on online courses. To my surprise, the learners indicated that they make a decision about whether their online course will be a good one or a bad one within the first two minutes of their initial login to the course. The learners indicated that they base this decision on how well the course is organized. It is crucial for your learners' benefit and for your own self-preservation that your course be designed in such a way that it creates a clear pathway of learning through the content. The most frequent criticism I hear about online courses is how confusing the course is or how unclear it is to find the proper path within the course. *Conquering the Content* will provide a strong organizational framework for your course and ensure that your course can pass the Two-Minute Test.

IT'S OK TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE

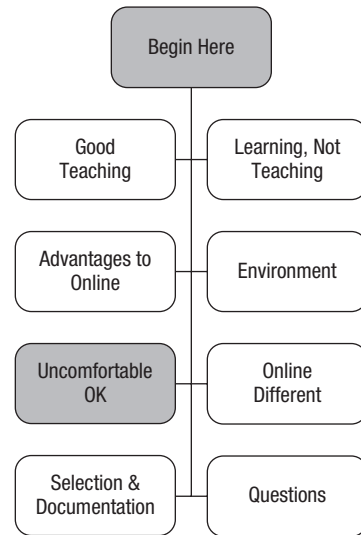
Faculty members are experts in their subject matter, and if you have many years of teaching experience, you most likely feel comfortable in the face-to-face environment. Many faculty thrive on the experience of sharing what they know with others. They have become accustomed to sharing

their knowledge in a face-to-face setting. If you are suddenly asked to alter those surroundings and place a course online, you may find yourself going through some major adjustments.

First, rather than being the expert, you find yourself in unfamiliar surroundings. You might think, “I don’t know how to put my course online, and I don’t have time to put my course online.” Put your mind at ease: you are supposed to feel uncomfortable about this and unsure about what you are doing. That is natural the first time you do something. It might feel uncomfortable even for a few semesters. It’s OK to do things you’ve never done before—that’s how we learn!

All of us who have put a course online did so the first time not really knowing what we were doing. This discomfort may actually be an advantage, according to Weimer (2002, p. 188): “When we opt for change that is not comfortable and is entirely out of the ordinary for us, we open ourselves to teaching as a learning experience, a point of personal development.” You are still going to be the subject matter expert; you may not be the technical expert, but honestly, do you really want to be? It is expected that you will ask for help on technical matters; you are not compromising your expertise.

Of course, you are going to have questions about online learning and the LMS; that is a given. But you don’t have time to learn everything there is to know about all of it, so prioritizing the things you need to know in order to teach your course is important. Learn from others who may be ahead of you; most people love to share information. There is likely a support unit at your institution. Find out what resources are available to you as you develop your online course. Is there someone to help with instructional design? Copyright issues? Production? If so, that is wonderful; take advantage of their services. If not, this need not deter you from making your course work available to students who are trying to further their education.

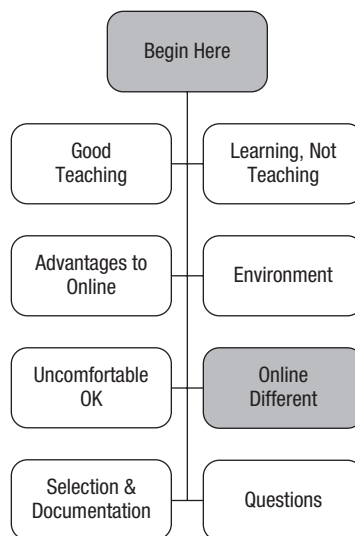


HOW ONLINE LEARNING IS DIFFERENT FROM FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

One of the most notable differences between the face-to-face and online environments is just that: the environment. First, you aren't standing at the front of the room ready to dispense knowledge to the learners. Second, they typically are not in a room full of other learners. In addition, they may or may not dedicate fifty minutes solely to the subject matter.

The Lack of Visual Cues

In the face-to-face environment, when you give encouraging words to one learner, you are simultaneously giving positive feedback to all the learners. But online learners never hear these words to other learners. Nor do they hear you say "good morning" or see a smile from you each class period. None of those cues are available to learners in online courses. Instead, for online learners, everything becomes verbal; it takes lots of verbal positive reinforcement to replace all those visual cues that they are not receiving.



The Learner's Role

Learners in an online environment are more responsible for their own learning than are those in a face-to-face environment. There is no longer a person standing at the front of the room to guide the learner through a lesson for an hour. Online learners need enough discipline to come to class by logging in and then working through the content. This is placing more responsibility on the learner to begin with. In addition, there is no one there saying, "Class is over at ten to the hour." So learners might continue working longer on a given lesson if their concentration is high (or a deadline is approaching) or might take a break earlier if their concentration is off at that moment.

It is helpful if you point out this greater responsibility to your learners. The Begin Here section of your course would be a great place for this information. Carol Dweck's research (2006) indicates that sharing with learners that they can improve with practice and repeated attempts can make a difference in their learning.

The greater responsibility of learners is another reason that directions and the pathway for progress through the course must be abundantly clear to them. Learning Guides, discussed in Lesson 3, help illuminate this pathway through the course.

Because of these differences in the environment, course content requires the following characteristics:

- Ability to be separated into short, directed learning segments—**chunk-ability**
- Ability to repeat and review content—**repeat-ability**
- Ability to stop and resume without having to start all over—**pause-ability**
- Ability to be easily comprehensible to learners—**understand-ability**

We'll talk more about these features in Lesson 5, Content, as you develop your content presentations.

The Faculty Member's Role

We've alluded to the changing role of the faculty member and the fact that this may be an adjustment for many individuals. Once you get over the initial shock of not being the one the students are focused on, it can be very freeing to help your learners see the reasons you are passionate about your subject matter. "Let me show you how cool this is!" is a much more invigorating role than "I'm going to teach you this." If you'll jump into this role with both feet, I think you'll be pleased with the results! It is perhaps a subtle change, but nevertheless an important one because it means taking on different responsibilities. You now need to explain the information, explore how to make connections with it, decipher what is most important, explain how it matters to everyday life, and reveal your thinking and problem-solving methods to learners. Your role now is to make sure that

you present information in a way that is relevant, understandable, memorable, and useful to the learners.

A faculty member who is acting as the sage on the stage is reaping the benefits of working with, structuring, and communicating the content. One goal in designing effective and efficient learning environments is for learners to work as intensively with the content as we might when teaching. Strategies that support this shift in perspective include having the students moderate discussion forums, prepare concept summaries and examples for other students, and assume greater responsibility as frontline moderators for the course (Boettcher, 2007).

The Distinction Between Course Design and Development and Course Delivery and Facilitation

This change in faculty role highlights the necessary distinction between design and development activities and delivery and facilitation activities in online courses. Your institution may have a template design that is used for courses in your program or on your campus. This has the added advantage that students are free to focus fully on the content in your course and not have the burden of relearning a different navigation method for each course. You may find yourself developing a course you do not end up teaching, or teaching a course you did not develop. This is becoming more and more common as institutions increase the number of online courses offered. Whether that is your situation or not, design/development and delivery/facilitation are independent, but also highly interdependent, activities in online courses.

Unlike in a face-to-face course, in an online course the course design and development tasks need to be completed before any portion of the course is delivered, so that the semester can be spent on the delivery and facilitation aspects of the course. In this book, we will focus most of our time on course design and development. There are several good references to aid course facilitation, including Conrad and Donaldson (2012), Lehman and Conceição (2010), and Palloff and Pratt (2004).

The Current Preparation for Future Updates

Most courses need to be updated soon after being produced; therefore, it is best to design your course from the beginning such that it accommodates updates. The course development system described in this book is strategically planned so that the design and organization of content and the placement of certain aspects of the course create a blueprint for the process of design, which also accommodates updating your course in a systematic way.

Perhaps you are now teaching a course that meets only in the fall, and you have no plans to change that schedule. Nevertheless, with the rapidly changing e-learning environment, it is difficult to anticipate exactly what will take place in the next few years. Therefore, by following the blueprint in *Conquering the Content*, you will be ready when the need arises for you to teach the course in a five-week summer term, a four-week midwinter course, a six- or seven-week accelerated course, or any other format that might arise. We will be naming content based on topics rather than time. Also, book and chapter number references will be confined to a particular place (Learning Guides) so that you needn't track down those references throughout the many pages of course information.

In addition, this course design system will prepare you for the new edition of the book you use. As educators, we do not want to place ourselves in the position that our course materials are in such great shape that we do not want to update them or that it's too much trouble to update them. As I created my first online course, I realized how much work I was putting into it and knew I had to make it easy to update; starting from scratch was going to be more than I was prepared to tackle in the near future. Content in this system is named and labeled in a logical and retrievable manner and is in segments short enough that when you need to make changes, you do not have to recreate large portions of the course.

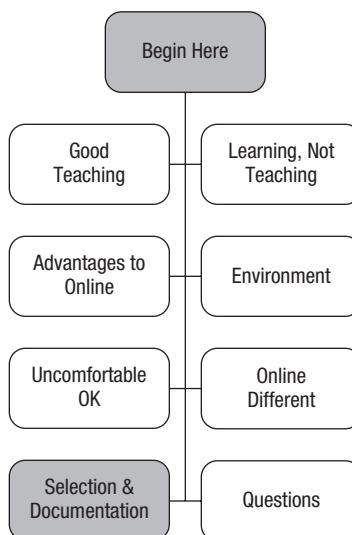
In addition to book and information updates, sometimes a rapid response time is extremely important when updates to content are needed. In a project I was involved with, we needed to release content revisions to medical learners concerning the switch in position on hormone replacement therapy, and to do so quickly. We needed to be able to update the online course in one week. The majority of that time was spent on

developing the content; we were able to update the course in minutes. Fortunately, the design of the course allowed the updates to be added easily. Following this design system will allow you to do the same.

This system will also accommodate adding components to the course progressively as you teach. The majority of teachers are constantly monitoring and adjusting, and it is no different in an online course. After you have taught your online course the first time, you will find components you'd like to alter based on your experience and learner feedback. This system makes editing and adding improvements to your course easy.

COURSE SELECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

Select one course to develop as you work through *Conquering the Content*. You may have more than one you need to complete, but for now, choose only one. Preferably this course will be taught a semester or two in the future so that you will have some time to work through this book. As you recall from the Introduction, there will be stopping points along the way, so regardless of the amount of time you have before you begin teaching this course, we can make excellent progress toward a well-organized course.



ACTION ITEM 3

Select one course on which to focus as you work through the process outlined in this book.

Gather all materials associated with the selected course, including syllabus, schedule, objectives, assignments, quizzes, book, feedback from student evaluations of teaching, and so on.

Course Documentation

For now, it will be helpful to document what is currently taking place in the course you'd like to work with as we progress through *Conquering the Content*.

To facilitate understanding, I'm providing a completed example of the next Action Item and form.

EXCERPT FROM COMPLETED SAMPLE

CURRENT CONTENT ORGANIZATION		
Content Covered	Quiz or Assignment	Notes
Ecology	Quiz—100 points	Easy lesson, most students are familiar with the topic
Cells	Quiz—100 points	Difficult topic, need lots of visuals
Cell Physiology	Process Project—100 points Quiz—50 points	Long lesson, difficult for learners to understand, need some animations or sequential still drawings so learners can grasp concepts. Addition of the project helps learners understand the one process they produce; how to help them with the others? Possibly add learner presentations so others can benefit from their work.

ACTION ITEM 5



Document current course organization and the benefits or challenges of individual lessons.

FORM 5

CURRENT COURSE ORGANIZATION

CURRENT CONTENT ORGANIZATION		
Content Covered	Quiz or Assignment	Notes

Form available at www.josseybass.com/go/conqueringthecontent

QUESTIONS FROM FIRST-TIME ONLINE INSTRUCTORS

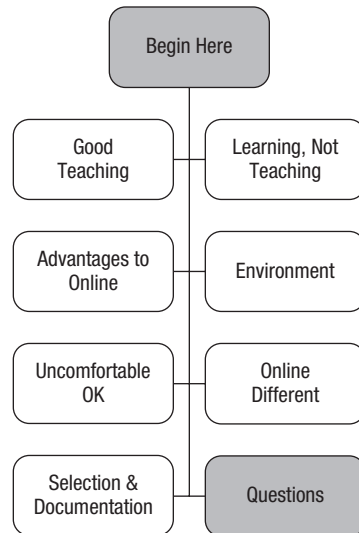
I typically am asked the same several questions each time a new instructor begins teaching online. I'll answer those for you here. If you have taught online before, you might quickly skim over these questions and take this opportunity to save a bit of time and move ahead to Lesson 2, Content Map.

How Do I Know It's the Learner Doing the Work?

One thing you can do is to have learners turn in intermediate steps to the assignments so that you can learn the character and quality of their writing and work. For example, if learners have to write a term paper, you might require that they turn in the following items at progressive dates along the way to the final paper:

- Topic
- Resources to use
- Draft outline
- Revised outline
- Two to three draft paragraphs and additional subpoints for other sections of the outline
- Three to six draft paragraphs and additional subpoints for the remainder of the outline
- Bibliography
- A rough draft of the paper
- The final rewritten paper, including the bibliography

With all of these steps, the learner will have to show you work along the way. You can do the same thing for a speech, oral presentation, or lab project by asking to see all the intermediate steps. This also enables you to



give feedback to the learners. It helps them understand the development process for a major project, assists them with pacing themselves, and typically leads to their ending up with a much better final product than if they had not had to turn in these intermediate products for review.

How Do I Know It's the Learner Taking the Test?

Unless you have the learners use a webcam (and you watch each one individually), you really do not know that the correct learner is taking the test. In fact, the same situation exists in classes with large numbers of learners: you do not know that the correct learners are taking the test unless you check identification cards as they enter the room. Another option some faculty select is to have the learners go to a testing center for their exams, where they must present their identification. However, relying totally on exams for grades is not a recommended practice. Project-based assignments and other authentic assessments are more valuable.

How Do I Know They Aren't Looking at Their Books During the Test?

Unless you have them in a monitored environment, you don't. You just assume that they are looking at their books. Therefore, ask questions about concepts and ideas, not sentences from the book.

In a freshman biology course, I actually told my learners to have their books, notes, study guide, and everything else they'd done for class all filled out right in front of them for the test. This policy encouraged them to do the exercises I'd assigned. It did not punish those honest individuals who if I had said "no books" would have had "no books," while everyone else in the class would have had their books in front of them and thought nothing of it. Except to clarify spelling or some small point, the books and other study aids were of little help (and I had told them this in advance). I was testing concepts and ideas, and asking them to apply these concepts and ideas. I was not lifting sentences out of the book and making multiple-choice questions out of them.

How Do I Balance Effort and Points?

You are trading one commodity for another with the learners. The commodity you have to trade is points; the commodity the learners have to trade is time and effort. Therefore, if an assignment takes a large amount of time and effort, it should be rewarded with a large number of points in your course. Conversely, if an assignment or test requires a small effort and little time, it should earn a small number of points in your course. I know that this is mostly common sense, but sometimes it is helpful to state the obvious. I had students complain once that a faculty member had only 10 points in the entire course. A three-page paper was worth one point. I know that is the same as 100 points out of 1,000, but it was disorienting to students compared to the amount of points they received for similar effort in other courses. If you want learners to spend a lot of time on an assignment, you signal that by the number of points you attach to it.

How Do I See the Lightbulb Turning On or the Blank Stare?

It is essential that you incorporate enough feedback and response opportunities from learners so that you will know how things are going. Rather than being able to look into their eyes, you will now be using their work, the questions, and their conversations as your gauge for how learners are progressing with their understanding. In the face-to-face environment, you have daily opportunities to read their reactions; if you use only the major tests to gauge their understanding, you will miss opportunities to correct misperceptions, reteach portions of the course, and clarify difficult concepts.

How Can I Teach Online and Still Have a Balanced Life?

It is possible, and also really important to both you and your students. Determine your availability and clearly communicate that to the students. It may take a semester or two of teaching online to find the right

pattern that you'd like to stick with. My first semester teaching online, I was available too much. I quickly learned that if I ever answered a question after 11:00 p.m., I would be expected always to answer questions that late. Learners will likely need more than what you would spend in class with them, as they may not be available at the same time you are. So logging in Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. is not responsive enough to learner needs. Determining the best availability frequency is a matter of considering how your course assignment due dates are structured, your learners' needs, and your own schedule. After experimenting for several semesters, I developed a system that worked for my course, my students, and my life. At 9:00 each morning I answered any questions that had been posted overnight. At 4:00 in the afternoon I answered any questions that had been posted since 9:00 that morning. One summer, the class members and I decided we wanted the weekends off, so I had Wednesday and Friday due dates, which meant that the learners could either work over the weekend or take the weekend off (for Wednesday assignments), and finish up whatever was due Friday before the weekend as well.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Will you have Sunday midnight due dates? If so, then your being unavailable to answer questions on the weekend is not fair to your learners.
- Do most of your learners work during the day? If so, then some evening availability times would be helpful.
- When are your assignments due? Learners will likely need some assistance in the hours before items are due.
- Frequency is important. Planning to spend all afternoon each Thursday to answer all questions they have for the week is not meeting learner needs.
- If you are available 24/7, this will become burdensome very quickly.
- Committing set times that learners can depend on will help set clear expectations with them so that they are not panicking that they cannot get in touch with you.

In the next lesson, Content Map, we will begin creating products for the course you've selected!

CONQUERING THE CONTENT IN ACTION

FACULTY EXAMPLES OF BEGIN HERE

- Share characteristics of successful learners from previous terms.
For example:
 - Frequency of login
 - Time spent online
 - Time spent studying
 - Participation in office hours or study groups
- Provide recommendations from former students about how to be successful in the course. Some formats used include:
 - A letter to future students
 - Audio or video interviews with former students
 - Chat session for current students to ask questions of former students
- Have only the Begin Here section of the course visible before the term begins and for the first few days of class to ensure that students become familiar with this section.
- Include an audio or video introduction.

SHARE

Share your Begin Here ideas and view others in the *Conquering the Content* Community: <http://ConqueringtheContent.com/BH/Share>

