

# Large Online/Remote Courses

Consultation with University of Toronto instructors who have online/remote teaching experience surfaced the following suggestions for developing and facilitating high enrollment (200+) courses:

## Top Three Takeaways

- 1) Create and nurture social presence: Make connections and engagement between instructor and students, as well as student to student. Curate a journey through the course and take the role of guide for your students through the term.
- 2) Redesign online tests, quizzes and exams: Shift focus away from high stakes and heavily weighted midterms and finals. Redistribute marks through smaller, formative, low stakes assignments across the term.
- 3) Lecture content delivery options are expanded: Decide what content has the most value for lecture-based delivery. Asynchronous lectures should be condensed and chunked into smaller themes and talking points. Synchronous lecture should be considered if only necessary for maintaining quality of lecture or building community.

## Course Management

### Consider:

Interactivity in online courses, particularly between the student and instructor, can play an important role both in student satisfaction and persistence. Communicate clearly and often so students feel connected to you.

- Social presence is important to online learners as it combats feelings of isolation and gives learners a feeling of community.
- Providing a clear path through the course and clearly communicating expectations decreases student anxiety and will save time for the instructor with requests on how to find and interact with content.

### Try This:

- Create a course orientation experience with a “How This Course Works” module to introduce students to how the course will run, manage expectations and develop a sense of community.
- Visit the [Example Remote/Online Course Template](#). You may upload this template into your own course or borrow tips and strategies from the “How This Course Works” module. Consider including items such as:
  - How to navigate the course
  - Your contact information and a paragraph about you and your work
  - Your syllabus
  - Where to find services and support
  - Academic integrity information
  - Tips for being a successful learner online
  - An introduction or icebreaker discussion or wiki for students to get to know each other

### How To:

- Add the example template content to your course shell. See [how to download and upload a course template](#).
- Create your own module with orientation material. See [how to work with modules and pages in Quercus](#).
- Add an extra personal touch by [creating a course tour video](#).

## Engaging Students

### Consider:

Develop students' critical and creative thinking skills in a technology-enhanced environment (regardless of class size) using student peer review and self-assessment.

- When students consider what makes one piece of writing stronger than another, they enhance their own understanding of the material.
- Students receive timely feedback, from multiple perspectives, even when the instructor is unable to respond quickly.
- Students can reflect on their learning and apply new insights from others.

### Try This:

- Using the institutionally-supported peer and self-assessment tool [peerScholar](#), students communicate and collaborate on assignments through several distinct phases, including the process of creation, evaluation and reflection. In the creation phase students read the assignment details and are asked to submit a completed assignment by a given date.
- After students create and submit their response, they enter the evaluation phase. In this phase they see their submission alongside of their peers' work. Students apply critical thought and quality-based discrimination in their review and evaluation of their peers' assignments.
- The final phase is the feedback process where students can see results and have the option to revise and resubmit as well as reflect on the process itself.

### How To:

- [See step by step instructions for peerScholar on the Quercus support site](#)
- Communicate clearly what is required of students at each stage and provide a detailed rubric for what is expected in the evaluation phase.
- Model good responses and provide practice with a demonstration before the first (graded) assignment.

## Assessment Strategies

**Consider:** More feedback opportunities provide grade transparency for students and creates a steady information flow in an environment in which student-teacher communication is crucial to success.

- Move away from high stakes, high grade assessments (e.g. 30% midterm and 40% final exam) and provide frequent, low stakes, low grade assessment pieces.

- Academic integrity can be maintained with question groups and other quiz set up options, such as timed quizzes.
- Frequent grades can establish a productive student-teacher conversation, and students have an ongoing answer to the question, “How am I doing?”
- Students have many opportunities to succeed, and there is a consistent, predictable, open evaluation structure.

**Try This:**

- Offer one or two small quizzes for each topic/unit/week of content. As you create your quizzes, consider adding small variations to the quiz questions and/or responses in randomized question groups.
- Provide multiple assignments for submission. Consider allowing multiple ways for students to submit a response or reflection on a topic. For example, you could allow students to choose text responses, audio responses or video responses to the same assignment question.

**How To:**

- Read about [creating quizzes in Quercus](#).
- Provide question variety and randomness to help with academic integrity: See [creating quiz question groups](#).
- Explore options for assignment types: See [creating assignment and assignment types](#).

## Lecture Delivery

**Consider:** Synchronous and asynchronous options offer different affordances for sharing lecture content and interacting with students online. When deciding to lecture and share content live or not, consider factors such as:

- class size
- required instructor to student interaction
- required student-to-student interaction
- necessity to schedule class at a specific time
- your comfort with managing live sessions

There is no need to lecture for full class hours that you would have when in person on campus. If you chose to produce short videos for asynchronous viewing you will find you can likely condense what would be a one-hour seminar into thirty minutes of video.

**Try This:**

- Offer synchronous online office hours. At set times during the term, such as before quizzes or tests, make Blackboard Collaborate sessions available for one or two hours for students to drop in and out to ask questions. Collaborate allows you to record transcripts of the chat sessions, so after each session ends, it can be shared with all students, allowing those who can't attend the chat the flexibility to catch up later.

- Create asynchronous lecture capture videos with Snagit. Record your voice over presentation slides. Consider natural breaks in a content piece and break up your lecture into “lecturettes” of a maximum of 10 – 15 minute lengths. If one main idea must be delivered in more than a 15-minute segment consider breaking it up into Part I and Part II. This will help hold student attention and provide you with breaks in your recording process.
- If you use synchronous webinar technology, make use of polls to keep your students engaged.
- Consider having TA’s offer tutorials using webinar technologies with smaller groups.

#### **How To:**

- Explore [options for creating asynchronous video](#) according to your skill level and which software you have or prefer to use.
- Watch this [short video for more about synchronous and asynchronous options](#).
- Choose from among [options for holding live sessions](#) according to your needs.

#### **References and Resources:**

[Tips for Designing and Moderating Large-Enrollment Online Courses](#)

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/frequent-low-stakes-grading-assessment-for-communication-confidence/>

<http://ocw.utoronto.ca/video-strategies/>

Croxton, R. A. 2014. The role of interactivity in student satisfaction and persistence in online earning. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 10(2), 314.

Lehman, R. M., & Conceição, S. C. O.(2010). Creating a sense of presence in online teaching: How to "Be There" for distance learners.