Instructor Presence

It's not necessarily about how much time you put in...

It's about being accessible to and connecting with your students.

Your Challenge:

1. **Read** the following paragraphs and view video(s)
2. **Review** the list of suggestions and choose several that could work for you
3. **Draft a plan** for your course that will demonstrate to your students that you are engaged, paying attention and are there to support their learning

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What do we mean by Instructor Presence and why is it important?

It means that your students can 'see' and 'hear' you; they can sense your presence in the course; you are 'there' even in asynchronous environments. An Introduction video where you introduce yourself and the course can help them see and hear you. They get a sense of who you are, why you like teaching this course, what about the content excites or engages you. Bits about your background can be included but don't make it a biographical epic. The way you phrase announcements or instructions can let your personality come through. Students will begin to 'see' and 'hear' you in email communication or discussion posts. All of this can be done asynchronously!

Think about how you can enjoy and maybe even have some fun in communicating with your students. Of course, there will still be some required communication: giving feedback on assignments, posting important announcements, alerting a student who may be falling seriously behind, etc. But even these tasks can be seen as supportive communication rather than stern correcting – and can be enjoyable when you allow your personality to come through. *(I notice that you have been silent in your team's discussion, lately. Is there something I can do to help? Maybe we can schedule a short zoom session - just you and I?)*

Created by Adrien Coquet
from Noun Project

Making sure that your students know you are present and paying attention is always important and probably even more so during the "Covid - everybody move online" time.

Arley Cruthers (McNeney) shows how she builds it into her course planning with a [Care/Connection](#) row in her weekly lesson planning (scroll down her pages to Week 1.)

This is **not** 24/7 work!

That would make for burnout not only for you but also for your students. Do not feel that you have to respond to student questions/concerns immediately. But let them know when you will respond e.g. within 24 hours or by 8:00 pm each evening.

Established a bit of a rhythm will help everyone. Students can begin to rely on your being available at certain times and in certain circumstances. For instance, you may send a morning announcement once or twice a week, schedule office hours [several times a week](#), make it a point to give personalized feedback on assignments (perhaps in an audio file) and facilitate a synchronous session once every other week.

Consider being available a bit more just before an assignment is due.

Don't try to do everything! Rather, choose what makes sense to you and for your particular course and students. As you get more comfortable you may decide you can do more.

View this 3:34 minute video: [Managing your online presence](#) and/or read this Faculty Focus article: [How to Keep from Going MIA in Your Online Course](#)

You may want to skim **Step eight: communicate, communicate, communicate, (**7 quick pages from Tony Bate's awesome online book, [Teaching in a Digital Age](#))

Note: Think about developing spaces and activities for students to engage with each other. It will help build a sense of community AND relieve you from 'doing it all'.

Suggestions that have worked for online instructors

Introduce yourself and welcome students to your course
- Create an Introduction video:
  - [10 steps to make video](#)
  - [Sample Intro Video](#) (1:00 min)
  - [Welcoming students to the online environment](#) (3:27 min)

    * Maybe extend this with a [Mid-Week Motivation](#) video

- Post a character-type drawing of yourself with accompanying text that identifies traits that make you an interesting person and instructor. (Not an artist? Grab a drawing or photo from the Internet.)

Office Hours: Try one of these or a combination
- Set synchronous office hours and ask students to book an appointment, maybe giving you a heads-up on what they want to ask or discuss.
- Create an asynchronous forum for students to post questions and set a time/date that you will respond e.g. Tuesdays & Thursdays by 4:00. These can be set up as private conversations or open so that all students benefit from the responses.
- Set up a Course Questions forum where students post questions and encourage students to help each other if they know the answer.

Mini-Tutorials: optional and informal
- Schedule a 20-30 minute synchronous session. Students can drop in for a discussion about a particularly confusing concept, an interesting current world or local event or an upcoming assignment
- Sometimes these can be facilitated by a volunteer student who has a particular interest or expertise and you are there just as a colleague

Regular Announcements: Some instructors prepare a very brief morning announcement for every day or M, W & F to Remind or call attention to the important items for the day. These are very short 1-2 paragraph, clear messages that can also incorporate your personality and interest with a cartoon, a quote, a link to a piece of music, a photo of your dog or last night's sunset, etc. You can invite students to contribute items for inclusion in future announcements.

- Using Announcements to Give Narrative Shape to your Online Course https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/using-announcements-to-give-narrative-shape-to-your-online-course/

Marking Assignments: Be sure you move beyond a grade and a single brief descriptor e.g. A-, Good Job! This may be fine for a short quiz but written assignments and other projects deserve more feedback – sincere and helpful feedback. If the performance was great, tell what, specifically, you think is great. If the product was lacking, give examples of where/how it could be improved. These need not be lengthy but they need to be thoughtful and something the students can benefit from…a learning experience, to some extent. The words you choose, emoticons you use, extra, more personal comments can all contribute to instructor presence.

Speaking of 'words' why not try attaching an audio/video file of you offering your feedback orally? Some LMSs offer this capacity. Another option is recording on your phone and uploading or emailing the file to the student.

- [How-to-give-effective-feedback-on-student-writing](#) from Faculty Focus
- [Excel-ent High-Speed Paper-Free Marking](#) from NurseKillam

Brief, personal emails:
- If you notice a student doing an especially good job at encouraging or interrogating other students in a discussion, send them a short email saying you noticed and thanking them for being a supportive colleague to their classmates.
- If you notice a student who seems to be reticent in discussions you might send them a short email pointing to a an assignment they did well on or a post that was thought-provoking and encourage them to share that insight in an upcoming synchronous session or discussion forum
- Sometimes you can comment to a small group of students, 'killing several birds with one stone.'
- Here is a [set of instructions](#) to make this a quick and effective action from Arley Cruthers (McNeney).

Dropping into student discussions: This can be a tricky one. In some discussions it will seem best to leave the students alone to have their own discussions. Yet, in others you want to drop in, skim some of the posts, and then add comment/question to guide the discussion to more pertinent points, clarify a misconception or compliment a specific point or two they have raised. And there may be discussions that you want to be a full participant in. Any of these approaches can contribute to instructor presence and need to be employed appropriately. For sure, you don't want to over-do your participation in something that is supposed to be a student discussion.

- [Instructor Presence: not too much, not too little - Doug Hamilton](#) (1:28 min)
- [Jen Walinga shares a strategy to avoid being overwhelmed by discussion posts](#) (1:18 min)

Social Gatherings: Some instructors on campus invite small groups of students to join them for coffee or to share a pizza or, depending on the age of the students, for a drink and discussion. Of course, face-to-face gatherings are problematic at the moment so we have to get a bit creative.

- Hold a morning Zoom session over coffee or a wine & cheese session in the afternoon or evening. The discussion can be purely social or it can be about a current event, movie, book, social media post, etc.
- Invite students to join you in attending an online event (Many media and civic groups are facilitating these, now.)
- Invite them to join you in a virtual tour of a museum or world venue. You or a student can share your desktop and lead the tour with everyone chatting as you view different areas.

Potential Responses to the Challenge

1. Record a three-minute video to introduce you and your course. ***We highly recommend that you do this one, for sure!***
2. Draft several "Weekly Announcements" for the first few weeks of your course. Make them relevant to course content and activities BUT also include a bit of 'you' in them. (Most course delivery systems let you draft announcements and allow you to set a publishing date. So, you can draft them now and update/modify them later.)
3. Identify times/days for Office Hours and articulate how students will access them. (Do they drop into a regularly scheduled Zoom meeting? Do they book an appointment with you via email, google doc table, or a tool in your LMS?)
4. Plan tutorials for dates when you think your students might need a little extra help from you. Briefly describe topic, timeframe and any materials/slides you might use.
5. Identify a social event that you will invite your students to 'attend' with you.