

Resource Guide

Getting Started: Considerations When Teaching with Online Technology

Online courses are increasingly “tech-rich” in their features and orientation. Recent advances in software and smartphone apps allow any instructor to upload a video lecture, podcast, or presentation to their course. Faculty are also turning to interactive simulations to create student-specific learning paths, while staples of online courses, such as discussion boards, are being transformed by student-produced visual and audio content. The ability to include various types of technology is a clear advantage of online courses in comparison to their in-person counterparts, yet faculty often default to using technology incorrectly or without much design consideration. How can you leverage the tech-rich environment associated with online courses to promote learning? In addition, how can you possibly keep up with emerging tools and trends when, as Judy Boettcher and Rita-Marie Conrad (2016, p. 62) note, “digital tools are changing faster than we can describe them”? Below are tips to help situate yourself in an increasingly tech-rich online learning environment:

- **Start small.** It is easy to get overwhelmed by the tools and options at your disposal. Educational scholars Flower Darby and James Lang (2019) suggest the “small change approach” to adopting technology in the online classroom, which is marked by instructors making minor modifications and adjustments. Consider, for example, your desire to include high-quality video lectures in a new course next semester; instead of creating videos for every topic, start small by creating short, informal lectures, announcements, or tutorials for topics or themes students find difficult. Add a few more videos the second, third, or fourth time you teach the course with the realization that students are benefiting from your presence, even if you do not have all of the videos you want or are not comfortable with certain edits. Not only does this approach provide immediate, tangible benefits, it also builds your confidence with using and incorporating technology in your classroom.
- **Pedagogy first, technology second.** Focus on why you want to incorporate technology in your course. Do you want students to apply theory to practice? Consider using an interactive simulation or problem-based learning module that tasks students with applying knowledge. Do you want to increase student collaboration in an otherwise asynchronous learning environment? Consider utilizing shared documents or a video-based discussion board. If you focus too much on the illustrious “best” tool or become wedded to a particular tool, you run the risk of losing sight of the pedagogical reasons that informed your decision to enhance instructional delivery by incorporating technology to begin with.
- **Be intentional.** Including technology just for the sake of impressing students is often a poor instructional design choice. Students are technologically adept in the sense that

they use a variety of tools in their daily lives; however, they may not know how to access your course in the LMS or create a discussion board post (Twenge, 2017; Darby and Lang, 2019). Keep in mind that your use of technology requires additional attention to teaching the tool itself so your students can benefit from its inclusion.

- **Regularly follow higher education resources.** *Wired Campus* and *Technology & Learning* are essential resources offered by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. News, blogs, and articles are regularly published, which allows you to stay in sync with emerging tools and trends. Including technology requires a considerable amount of time in the form of research, getting to know specific tools, and practicing with that tool through trial and error.

Resources

Boettcher, J. and Conrad, R-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darby, F. and Lang, J. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Twenge, J. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy- and completely unprepared for adulthood*. New York: Atria.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).