

# Teaching Online/Remotely – Planning for Next Term

Instructors can extend their teaching presence through technology when moving courses online or delivering them remotely. This resource provides information and strategies to increase your readiness for this transition and will help you plan your course from start to finish.

## How is remote teaching different from traditional face-to-face teaching?

In remote delivery, you do not meet with your students in person. While this might pose challenges, technology provides affordances to deliver your courses. Technological tools enable you and your students to:

- Develop and share course content and materials
- Meet synchronously (i.e., in real-time)
- Communicate with one another
- Receive, evaluate, and provide feedback on student work

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## 1. Planning Your Course

### Getting ready for teaching and learning online

Many tools and support resources are available to help you move your classes online, engage your students in remote learning and meet course learning objectives. Most of the activities can be implemented through Quercus. The guidance provided in this section focuses on assessing your readiness and the readiness of your students for the move to teaching and learning in an online context. Advanced tools are marked with an asterisk (\*).

## Key Concepts:

- **Preparing yourself**

Depending on your previous experience, you may need to become familiar with new tools or refresh your skills to fast track migration of your course to an online format. Decisions regarding changes should be realistic and aligned with your experience and skill level. Assess your own readiness and the time you have available for adapting your course for the coming term.

*Consider:*

- Am I confident in my Quercus skills?
- Do I have the know-how to make simple videos?
- Am I ready to choose between synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (recorded or text) options?
- Do I want to build my own course shell from scratch, or should I download and adapt an example online course shell?

*Try this:*

- Take time to review basic design guides and tutorials before you begin planning.
- Explore examples and ideas from colleagues who teach online.
- If you are new to online teaching, consider keeping it simple with the most common and basic tools.

*How to:*

- If you are not familiar with Quercus tools, visit the [Build Your Course site](#) to learn more.
- Download an example Quercus online course shell. [.zip file available soon from CTSI [Academic Continuity Planning](#) site]
- Register for [upcoming CTSI webinars](#) for design and technical guidance.

- **Preparing your students**

As our students are suddenly finding themselves participating in online courses, many may not be fully prepared or equipped for the current situation.

*Consider:*

- Keep in mind the technical resources and the online learning skills that students will need to succeed in your course.
- Plan to provide extra support and scaffolding as students adjust to learning online.

*Try this:*

- Provide guides for students regarding readiness for online learning.

- Be realistic about the technology and skill required by your students.
- Offer additional technology and skill tutorials for students.

*How to:*

- Provide a link to an online readiness guide for students.
  - *Example:* [Instructor Resource to Help Students: 5 Tips for Students](#)
- Direct your students to Quercus technical resources for students.
  - *Example:* [Quercus for Students](#) .
- Consider strategies for [Assisting Students with Limited Access to Technology](#).

## Making basic course format decisions

Contextual factors for your specific course such as the level of the course, nature of the subject and your learner characteristics will impact your decisions. In the design process, focus on the most important learning outcomes for your students and be prepared to adapt from classroom activities to new types of activities that are appropriate to the online environment. Creating a simple course migration plan before you begin to move your course online will speed up the development process in Quercus.

### Key Concepts:

- **Consider key situational factors**

Note any specific factors or constraints that will determine your approach to course redesign.

*Consider:*

- How many students in the class?
- What is the level of course (first-year, advanced, graduate)?
- Are there specific requirements for this course within the program (prerequisite course, program admissions)?

*Try this:*

- Make key decisions early. Examples include the following:
  - Large class - keep it simple and avoid live webinar events
  - Advanced class – consider assigning independent or group projects.
  - Specific requirements - structure modules for regular checkpoints to ensure learning outcome mastery.
- Determine if your redesigned course will use synchronous (real time) or asynchronous (recorded or text) options

*How to:*

- Review [Moving Online: Synchronous and Asynchronous Video Options](#) [video 6:12 min]
- **Create a plan for moving content, activities and assessments online**

When moving to an online environment it is important to focus on the most important learning outcomes and identify the corresponding activities that will support students learning. It may be necessary to let go of some elements of the classroom that cannot be replicated in the online environment and introduce new components.

*Consider:*

- Students learn by doing.
- In addition to providing foundational content, plan for activities that allow students to engage with that content and receive feedback on their progress.
- Students can learn through direct instruction from you or through peer interaction with each other.

*Try this:*

- Identify the critical learning outcomes for your students. This is not just the content to be “covered” but the skills they will need to succeed in the course.
- Decide on the assessments early in the planning process (See section 7)
- Include progressive steps in each week/module to build student skills and support success in assessments.

*How to:*

- Use this simple 3-column table to map out your course components.
  - *Example:* [Online Course Planner – 3 Column Table](#)
- Review CTSI’s resource on [Developing Learning Outcomes](#).

## 2. Building your Course

### Supporting orientation and navigation

Reassure students that you are there to support their transition by planning clear communications and course expectations. Learners’ comfort with the activities you have planned can be supported through the introduction that you provide as a “front door” to your course and the communication protocols you establish. The overall structure of the course site needs to be easily navigated and designed from a student-centric viewpoint.

## Key Concepts:

- **Take a student-centred and supportive approach.**

It is important to take the viewpoint of a student who is alone at their home and trying to become oriented to course norms and the learning experience that you will be facilitating as the instructor.

*Consider:*

- One of the most important aspects of any student's learning is you, the instructor.
- Setting the tone is important, just as it is on the first day of a face-to-face course.
- Students look for you to provide direction, provide feedback and encouragement, and guide them on their course journey.
- As an instructor you can provide guidance to students regarding expectations related to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

*Try this:*

- Include a welcome video
- Link students to tips on online learning including [Instructor Resource to Help Students: 5 Tips for Students](#)
- Describe your availability and method by which students should communicate with you (e.g. email, discussion forum, office hours on webinar, etc.)
- Include an opening survey to check for students' prior knowledge and/or experience in an online environment. (For example, are you teaching majors or non-majors? What technologies do they have available at home? How reliable is their internet access/connection?)

*How to:*

- Make a video using [Quercus rich content editor video tool](#) [tutorial]  
*Example: [Creating a Course Tour using Lecture Capture Software](#) [video 2:23 min]*

- **Clear navigation and structure are critical**

Online learning requires clear expectations and intuitive navigation steps to ensure students sustain their engagement and motivation throughout the full course.

*Consider:*

- The home page can provide an effective base for the overall organization of your course.

- Students will appreciate provision of multiple access points or repetition of key information.

*Try this:*

- Ensure home page has clear information regarding course navigation and key resources.
- Plan overall navigation of the course for ease of use/organization/access; remove un-used links.
- Include information about course participation “netiquette” or group agreements.
- Include an FAQ page or discussion forum for general questions.
- Create a “course tour” using video or PowerPoint.

*How to:*

- [How do I change my course home page?](#) [tutorial]  
*Example: [Screen shot of example course home template as a model](#)*
- Set up [Quercus discussion forums](#) [tutorial]  
*Example: [Netiquette: The Golden Rules for online courses](#)*

## Designing student-centric course modules

Consistency in module design and pace helps students quickly understand your expectations, plan their work time more effectively and reduces their cognitive load.

### Key Concepts:

- **Organize course content into modules and content chunks.**  
A common practice in online course design is organization of course content and learning activities in a modular format by week or topic.

*Consider:*

- Beyond the home page, a clear student-centric view of the activity path and assignment requirements will allow students to easily understand your expectations and succeed in the course.
- Presentation of video or other digital content chunked into short segments allows students to more easily comprehend what they are seeing and hearing.

*Try this:*

- State the core learning goals for each course module.
- Create a learner task list for each module.
- In each module consider including the following:

- Content acquisition: lecture notes, readings, videos or student generated content
- Scaffolded learning activities: examples/demonstrations; visual aids; topic-specific vocabulary
- Check for understanding: reflections, quizzes, question and answer opportunity

*How to:*

- [Quercus Modules and Pages](#) guide [tutorial]

- **Determine how course content will be provided to students.**

A number of strategies are available as alternatives to in-class lectures.

*Consider:*

- Being realistic about the time and skills you have available to create digital lecture content is important when planning on a short timeline (Content may be created weekly on a just-in-time basis.)
- There may be existing digital texts or open educational resources that are available at no cost online.
- Planning for flexibility and accessibility should be a priority to ensure you are reaching all your students.

*Try this:*

- Create simple video lectures, post and link to your course site.
- Deliver webinar lectures in real time webinars and record.
- Consult with your liaison librarian to identify existing digital resources that might be used for your course or for library syllabus service.
- Choose tools with which you are most familiar or use Quercus tools.
- Design content for flexible access by all your students, as they will have a range of abilities, technologies and bandwidth capacity to access digital content.
- Review “Making your content accessible” section of this document for captioning strategies.

*How to:*

- Contact the library for [UTL syllabus services and support for remote teaching](#)
- Choose video format: [Moving Online: Asynchronous and Synchronous Lecture Options](#) [video 6:12 min]
- Record screen or webcam for a lecture or presentation.
  - [Snagit lecture capture](#) (Mac and PC)
  - [QuickTime](#) Video (Mac)

- [Record Voice Over PPT](#) (Mac and PC)
- Record webcam for quick messaging and announcements.
  - [Quercus rich content editor video tool](#)
- Upload and host video content.
  - [UTL MyMedia \(for UofT faculty, staff and students\)](#)
  - [Create a channel on YouTube](#) and [upload video to YouTube](#)
- Hold a live lecture, office hour, or question and answer period:
  - [Bb Collaborate Ultra Webinar Tool](#)
  - [Microsoft Office Teams Video](#)

### 3. Engaging Students

#### Designing student learning activities

In online delivery it is important and possible to provide engaging opportunities through active learning. Student engagement activities can be supported online in both synchronous and asynchronous environments. Evidence shows numerous benefits of using active learning activities to engage students:

- Motivates students to be engaged learners;
- Increases content knowledge, critical thinking and recall of course content,
- Allows for inclusion of different learning needs; and
- Gets students involved in higher order thinking such as analysis, synthesis, creative thinking, adaptability, problem-solving, etc.

#### Key Concepts:

- **Facilitating Discussions**

*Consider:*

- When facilitating an online discussion, start by creating shared norms for participation and setting the stage and tone of the class discussion.
- Provide prompts or goals for the discussion to guide learning.
- Whether in a text discussion forum or a live break out, be sure to monitor activity and provide feedback.

*Try this:*

- Ask students to link the main topic of the week to their own experience as a starting point.



- Ask students to find an example related of the topic in the media and share a response.
- Post a fact, quote, or question and ask students to apply a theory or explain that particular example.

*How to:*

- Learn more about [Creating and Managing Discussions](#) [tutorial]
- Read more about [Engaging Students in an Online Environment](#).
- For small groups of students, consider a synchronous real time discussion in a [Bb Collaborate webinar](#) as an alternative.
- Contact [UofT libraries](#) for instructor support for online teaching and learning activity design.

- **Collaborative Group Projects**

*Consider:*

- Group projects facilitate authentic learning experiences and generation of sharable digital resources.
- The digital environment provides an opportunity for students to gain valuable transferable skills.

*Try this:*

- Create a course wiki by having class participants build an online repository of course documents where instructors and students can post relevant documents, tips, news, etc.
- Provide a problem scenario to solve related to the topic of the course. The output could be a digital design document, policy recommendation or lab protocol, depending on the subject matter.
- Move a case study activity to the online environment; include a video or web site as a prompt.

*How to:*

- [Create a wiki by adding a course page](#) [tutorial]
- Create group work areas for collaborative project activities using the [UT Advanced Group Tool](#) [tutorial]
- Use [Bb Collaborate webinar](#) for class to share project work and answer questions. [guide]

- **Presentations**

*Consider:*

- Online synchronous presentations provide an opportunity for students to develop oral communication skills in the online environment.
- Digital presentations help student develop new visual communication skills.

*Try this:*

- Students (individuals or groups) record a voice-over presentation to be shared with the whole class by posting to discussion forum.
- Consider expanding media options including PowerPoint, video or infographic to explain a key concept to their peers.
- Have students write a short text assignment and share it for peer feedback using the Quercus peer feedback tool.

*How to:*

- [Create a wiki by adding a course page](#) and allowing students editing rights. [tutorial]
- Use the [discussion forum](#) to share group work. [guide]
- Use the [peer review tool](#) to allow students to share give each other feedback on project work. [guide]

- **Breakout Discussions**

*Consider:*

- Holding a live webinar session offers real-time connection between instructor and student as well as student-to-student interaction.
- A live webinar session can provide a social community experience.
- Consider the need for recordings or alternatives for students with logistical challenges related to time zone or bandwidth.
- Provide the opportunity for text chat - also not all students will feel comfortable sharing using a mic and/or webcam.
- Discussion forums can also be used as asynchronous breakout rooms.

*Try this:*

- Using [Bb Collaborate](#), assign students to small groups where the students can work collaboratively to solve a problem, discuss and debate topic points, or prepare a presentation. [guide]
- Divide students into groups in [discussion forums](#). [guide]
- Invite students to take various roles such as leading the discussion, prompting their peers, or preparing summary notes.

*How to:*

- Use [breakout function in Bb Collaborate](#) for breakout groups. [guide]

- Use the [discussion forum](#) for breakout groups. [guide]

## Assessing learning

Assessments are a crucial component of student learning. In offering students feedback and grades, we gauge their understanding of the material at hand and support their development in our courses. As you move to the online environment, review your assessments and consider whether or not they can be modified for the online environment, particularly those with practical or experiential components. You can still bring the best practices of assessment design to the creation of your online assignments.

### Key Concepts:

- **Designing Alternatives for Graded Assessments**

If you determine that you will need to develop assessment alternatives, creativity may be needed to redesign pre-existing assessments for an online environment.

*Consider:*

- For previously developed assessments that have required that students go out into the community, access library or laboratory resources, or work in in-person groups, you will need to modify these assessments.
- Clear assignment instructions are crucial to support student success. Details are important but also consider the value of being concise to ensure students will be able to easily read and follow the instructions.
- Provide examples or models of assessments (good and bad!) to give students a clear idea of your expectations.

*Try this:*

- Browse for ideas regarding [assessment alternatives](#) for graded assessments in the online environment.
- Consult with your [liaison librarian](#) for information on library resources students can access to complete an assessment.
- Use video instructions to communicate information related to an assessment.
- Implement [Turnitin](#) service to detect text similarity in final assessments.
- Build elements of your lab in the online environment.
- Anticipate the need for accommodation of students with disabilities completing online assessments and be prepared to provide alternatives.

*How to:*

- Use Quercus [quizzes](#). [guide]

- Use Quercus [assignments](#). [guide]
- Use the [gradebook](#) in Quercus. [guide]
- Use [TechSmith Snagit](#) to create video instructions.[guide]
- Use [Bb Collaborate Ultra](#) to respond to student questions about assessments in real-time. [guide]
- Visit resource sites for strategies for moving labs online:
  - [Tips for Labs and Hands On Courses](#)
  - [Run Lab Activities](#)
- Visit additional resource sites:
  - CTSI's guide on [Practical Strategies for Formative Assessment](#) contains suggestions for working in the online environment.
  - UofT [EdTech Catalogue](#) of institutionally supported tools.
  - [UofT libraries](#) support for instructors on online teaching and learning.
- **Feedback and Checks for Understanding**

In addition to graded assignments and tests (summative assessment), providing feedback and checks for understanding (formative assessment) can help both you and your students evaluate their progress and understanding of the online course material.

*Consider:*

- Students can assess their own work through reflection and assignment guides.
- Student can receive feedback from you as the instructor, and from each other as peers.

*Try this:*

- Provide opportunities for student self-assessment through active learning activities such as:
  - reading, thinking and speaking critically
  - expressing ideas through writing
  - examining personal attitudes and values
  - giving and receiving feedback
  - reflecting on the learning process
- Include short content quizzes (graded or ungraded) to check for understanding in an asynchronous lecture.
- Use peer-review assessments to increase student engagement in an assessment.
- Use the discussion board to receive quick student responses and feedback.

*How to:*

- Build a [quiz](#) in Quercus. [guide]
- Create [peer-review assignments](#) in Quercus. [guide]
- Set up [peerScholar](#) in your assignments. [guide]
- Visit the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's (STLHE) [resources on online assessment](#).

- **Using Rubrics to Support Students and Faculty**

A good practice for alleviating student anxiety – and, simultaneously, easing your evaluation process – is the development of clear rubrics as frameworks outlining the criteria required for successfully completing assessment requirements. Example of rubrics are provided in the “How To” section below. Rubrics are effective in communicating your expectations to students and ensure fairness and consistency across all of your grading, especially if you are working with a large team of Teaching Assistants.

*Consider:*

- Quercus provides a simple tool for sharing rubrics with both students and TAs.
- Provide your TAs who support grading with rubrics. This will enable greater efficiency and consistency for grading and assessment.
- If you're working with first-time TAs, they are entitled to [paid training](#) that will support their grading practice.

*Try this:*

- Build your rubric using the following four steps:
  1. Identify Your Learning Outcomes
    - What do you want students to demonstrate by the end of the assignment?
  2. Determine Your Evaluation Criteria
    - Evaluation criteria are the knowledge and skills you want students to demonstrate on an assessment.
  3. Create a Rating Scale
    - For example, will you use grade levels (A, B, C, D, etc.?) or percentages?
  4. Provide Descriptions for Each Part of Your Rubric
    - Offer details about what level of proficiency each grade level demonstrates.

*How to:*

- Review Association of American Colleges and University's [repository of rubrics](#) examples - these can be modified based on your context. [guide]
- Visit the Quercus [rubrics](#) page for more information on how to create, add, and manage rubrics in your course. [guide]
- Use [non-scoring rubrics](#) in Quercus SpeedGrader. [guide]
- Learn to [manage rubrics](#) once they are in your online course. [guide]

## 4. Making your online course accessible

There are many ways to create a more accessible, equitable and inclusive learning community in the online environment. Small changes to your course materials and structure can eliminate barriers for all your students, not just the ones who may require individual accommodations. To help all your students learn course content, it is important to make all of your course materials accessible.

### Key Concepts:

- **Make your documents and slide decks accessible**

Give consideration to the formatting and structure of your Word documents before converting them to PDF. This will help all your students navigate the information contained in these materials.

*Try this:*

- Use of proper layout and organization of content supports students who use assistive technology (ie adding proper headings, lists, columns).
- Help students identify relevant linked content (ie describe the destination in link text rather than using "click here").
- Create alternative text for all images, graphics and complex tables/charts.
- Choose styles and templates with high contrast and simple fonts.

*How to:*

- Use the [Accessible Word Document Checklist](#) to confirm accessible formatting for your existing and new documents.
- Explore the [Creating Accessible PDF files](#) to create content with tags that are hidden accessible elements which offer information for screen readers.
- Assess the accessibility of your documents using the [Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#).

- **Make your videos and screencast lectures accessible**

As videos and screencast lectures (i.e., lecture-capture videos) offer lots of visual content to students, it is important to provide some sort of text equivalent of spoken words through captions transcripts or description of the audio, which allow everyone to read what is being said or discussed.

*Try this:*

- Provide captions of video recordings.
- Transcripts are also helpful as an alternative.

*How to:*

- [YouTube automated captioning](#) with edit function.
- Use most recent version of [PowerPoint for Windows to create captioned voice over presentations](#).

- **Make your Quercus course content accessible**

There are many features and strategies that can enhance the accessibility of the content in Quercus.

*Try this:*

- Add alternative text (i.e., tags) when embedding external images.
- Include text headers and use indentation within modules to help guide student navigation.
- Use a meaningful naming convention in modules and items within modules (e.g., name the module “Chapter 1: Introduction to Sociology,” not just “Chapter 1”).

*How to:*

- Review the [General Accessibility Design Guidelines](#) from Canvas (i.e., Quercus).
- Explore the [Accessibility Checker](#) in the Rich Content Editor.
- Examine detailed [CTSI Accessibility Guidelines](#) to review tips and strategies for course design.

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Developed collaboratively by the **Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation** and **Online Learning Strategies – Information Technology Services** at the University of Toronto (April 1, 2020).

