

Seven Principles of Effective Online Teaching

The “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) are a popular framework for evaluating face-to-face teaching and also useful in evaluating online courses.

Principle 1: Good Practice Encourages Student-Faculty Contact

Lesson for online instruction: Instructors should provide clear guidelines for interaction with students

- Establish policies describing what kinds of communications are to take place in different channels: (e.g. “The public discussion forum is to be used for all communication except grade-related questions.”)
- Set clear standards for instructors’ timelines for responding to messages.

Principle 2: Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students

Lesson for online instruction: Well-design discussion assignments facilitate meaningful cooperation among students.

- Learners should be required to participate (and their grade should reflect this requirement).
- Discussions should focus on a task, and tasks should result in a product (such as a review).
- Learners should receive feedback on their discussions from the instructor.
- Grades should be based on the quality of the postings, and not the length or number.
- Instructors should post expectations for discussions.

Principle 3: Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

Lesson for online instruction: Students should present course projects.

- Projects are often part of face-to-face courses, and online instructors should provide opportunities for projects to be shared asynchronously, so that students can learn from each other.

Principle 4: Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback

Lesson for online instruction: Instructors need to provide two types of feedback: information feedback and acknowledgment feedback.

- Information feedback provides information or evaluation (i.e. an assignment grade or a comment) while acknowledgement feedback confirms that some event has occurred.
- When time constraints increase as the semester progresses, instructors can still give prompt feedback on assignments by responding to the class as a whole.

Principle 5: Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task

Lesson for online instruction: Online courses need deadlines.

- Regularly-announced deadlines encourage students to spend time on tasks and help students with busy schedules avoid procrastination.

Principle 6: Good Practice Communicates High Expectations

Lesson for online instruction: Challenging Tasks, sample cases, and praise for quality work communicate high expectations.

- Provide students with models to follow, along with comments explaining why the examples are good. Publicly praising exemplary work communicates high expectations.

Principle 7: Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

Lesson for online instruction: Allowing students to choose project topics incorporates diverse views into online courses.

- Instructors can provide guidelines to help students select topics relevant to the course while still allowing students to share their unique perspectives.

Sources (adapted from):

1. Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE bulletin*, 39, 3-7.
2. Graham, C., Kursat, C., Lim, B., Joni, C., & Duffy, T. (2001). Seven principles of effective teaching: A practical lens for evaluating online courses. Available at http://technologysource.org/article/seven_principles_of_effective_teaching/