

# MiraCosta Online Class Quality Guidelines

*The following guidelines were developed by the MiraCosta Online Educators committee to help faculty develop and redesign online classes and foster conversation in departments about effective and equity-minded teaching practices in online education. The document has three sections:*

- **[PART I: REQUIREMENTS](#)**  
Required elements for Distance Education classes at MiraCosta College as per [AP4105](#).
  - **[PART II: PRACTICES](#)**  
Effective and equity-minded teaching practices and examples.
  - **[PART III: PRINCIPLES](#)**  
Evidence-based guiding principles, key equity practices, and quality indicators in online education.
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## **[PART I: REQUIREMENTS](#)**

### **Required Elements for Classes that Include Distance Education**

*Essential elements that are required by the department, the district, and mandates included in [AP 4105](#). Many of them can be implemented using the examples in the [Effective Practices](#) section below.*

#### **[Instructors of online and hybrid classes must:](#)**

- A. Abide by any departmental directives in the course outline of record.**  
Directives include the course description, course content outline, performance objectives, assignments, methods of instruction, methods of evaluation, required materials, student learning outcomes, and any specifications of how the course is or is not to be taught as an online/hybrid section as specified in Form A.
- B. Abide by the [MiraCosta syllabus checklist](#).**
- C. Ensure regular effective contact between instructor and students.**  
Requirements include establishing expectations on the frequency and timeliness of such contact, including frequent, quality, instructor-initiated interaction, feedback, and managing unexpected instructor absences.

Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all MiraCosta College course sections in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education, instructors will use a variety of means to initiate contact with students, such as the following:

- a. Threaded discussion forums (with appropriate instructor participation)
- b. "Questions for the instructor" forums
- c. General email
- d. Weekly announcements
- e. Timely and frequent feedback for student work
- f. Instructor-prepared electronic lectures or introductions in the form of electronic lectures to any publisher-created materials (written, recorded, broadcast, etc.) that, combined with other course materials, create the virtual equivalent of the face-to-face course section.

**D. Ensure regular effective contact among students.**

Contact among students provides the opportunity for students to receive the benefit of peer interaction in the learning environment.

Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all MiraCosta College course sections in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education, instructors will use a variety of means to enable student-to-student interaction, such as the following:

- a. Threaded discussion forums and other asynchronous interaction tools.
- b. Group projects.
- c. Peer review activities.
- d. Peer presentations.
- e. Synchronous (live) online interactions.
- f. Collaborative documents and other tools for knowledge-building and sharing.

**E. Create an environment of academic integrity, monitor progress, and track attendance and participation.**

**F. Uphold [institutional procedures](#) to authenticate students.**

**G. Meet the [accessibility](#) requirements in state and federal regulations.**

**H. Be prepared to teach distance education in accordance with any department and college procedures, and negotiated agreements.**

- I. **Help students in a DE course section to be aware of MiraCosta College support services and resources, especially those available online.**
  - J. **Monitor students' engagement and success, and promptly and proactively initiate substantive interaction with students when needed on the basis of such monitoring and upon request by a student.**
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## PART II: PRACTICES

# Examples of Effective and Equity-Minded Online Teaching Practices

*The following examples of effective and equity-minded teaching practices were developed by the MiraCosta Online Educators committee based on [principles](#) for good teaching practice and encouraging equity in online education. This list is not meant to be prescriptive or all-inclusive. It includes examples that will vary in their applicability across classes and disciplines, and are offered to encourage creativity and exploration.*

## Design and Organization

### A. Organize your course so that it is easy to understand and navigate.

*Examples might include:* Menu organized as weeks with dates; modules organized progressively; course content organized into manageable “chunks”; consistent use of colors, fonts, icons, and other visuals to communicate information and ease navigation.

### B. Establish an encouraging tone and culture of support in your course documents.

*Examples might include:* Avoid punitive language. Implement supportive teaching where mistakes are expected and respected. Adopt welcoming language throughout the course, starting from the syllabus. If you are transitioning an in-person class to online, be sure to update language throughout your course documents to be specific to the online environment.

### C. Make use of supported technologies.

The college and departments provide many technologies that support online education. The college evaluates and implements these tools to ensure that principles of student privacy, information security, and technical accessibility are upheld, and that students and faculty have access to technical support. Instructors who use external (non-college-supported) tools should ensure that they meet these principles.

#### **D. Make success in the course transparent.**

Transparently and proactively answer the question: "What will it take to be successful in this course?" Let students know how they should approach the readings (model for them), study and prepare for exams and quizzes (starting from day 1), take and organize their notes (model for them).

#### **E. Explicitly establish community norms.**

Create expectations for frequency of communication among students; establish how participants are to share critical feedback and exchange perspectives; describe appropriate language for community members to use during interaction.

#### **F. Provide clear class information.**

*Examples might include:* Follow the [syllabus guidelines](#) mentioned in *Part 1: Requirements* of this document; list learning objectives and grading policy on the syllabus; include clear instructions and reminders of grading standards as each task is assigned; ensure that outcomes, content, and assessment are aligned and made explicit; provide expectations for appropriate communication in the class; provide clear information to students at the start of the semester about how to get started in the class; send regular updates and reminders to the class via announcements, email, social media.

## **Communication and Support**

#### **A. Set the tone for an inclusive classroom.**

Recognize that conveying your care and inclusion online can be a challenge. While all of the following are important for all classes, they may be especially important in setting an inclusive tone online.

*Examples might include:* Establish a culture of care. Adopt a decolonized, equity-minded, inclusive syllabus. Recognize the indigenous populations who lived in the land we are occupying. Include your personal pronouns. Include a variety of ways for students to reach you (email, text messages, office hours, etc.). Consider adding visual elements (pictures, gifs, videos, etc.) to the syllabus. Share if you speak another language. Show vulnerability with students by sharing your own challenges. Include statements of support for different student populations: LGBTQ, Undocumented Students (UPRISE), etc. Make sure all college level concepts can be understood by non-college students. Consider that your class could be the first college class your students are entering.

#### **B. Use positive and supportive language.**

Recognizing that learning online poses added challenges for many students, and that equity gaps for some disproportionately impacted student populations have historically been even larger for DE course sections compared to onsite, use positive language that rejects deficit perspectives and affirms the ability of every student to succeed online.

*Examples might include:* Implement supportive teaching where mistakes are expected and respected. Intentionally reject deficit perspectives about students' intellectual capacity or how "fit" or

"prepared" they are for college (validation and positive messaging are critical). Different students may need to hear affirming messages such as, "you belong," "you can do the work," "you can succeed," "you have the ability." Hold high expectations in performance and convey how invested we are in the success of each student.

**C. Provide opportunities for students to receive personalized and appropriate feedback about performance.**

Make sure students know that you care about their learning by authentically affirming their bigger picture goals in the context of specific class or assignment-related feedback. Take notes you can refer to later when giving personal feedback to students (the notes column in the Canvas gradebook can be useful to this end).

*Examples might include:* Individualized instructor feedback, group feedback from the instructor, peer feedback, use of audio or video feedback, automated feedback on objective quizzes, instructor summaries and comments in discussion forums, grading rubrics.

**D. Introduce yourself to students and orient them to your class.**

*Examples might include:* Brief orientation videos and introductions of yourself and the class, the assignments, Canvas, and/or to other technology they might need. Supplement written instructions when possible. Don't assume students know where to go or what to do.

**E. Introduce students to each other.**

*Examples might include:* Seek to create a sense of community and shared learning through relationship-building in introductory discussions/forums online. Have community building activities that value students' whole identity. Establish clear norms for collaborations.

**F. Address microaggressions.**

*Examples might include:* Monitor online discussions and intervene if/when microaggressions appear.

**G. Embrace race discourse.**

*Examples might include:* Be intentional about discussion of issues of race and racism.

**H. Provide opportunities for leadership.**

*Examples might include:* Set strong social presence expectations for students through authentic sharing in online discussions. Allow students to lead discussions and incorporate personal life experiences in online discussion.

**I. Allow for shared reflections and perspectives.**

*Examples might include:* Enable students to think critically and reflect on content, and to deepen class community by sharing these reflections. Extend reflections and self-evaluation on content to how the learning can improve personal lives and communities.

**J. Provide proactive advice.**

*Examples might include:* Don't assume students have skills to succeed online. Encourage and

facilitate use of resources such as tutoring and technical support. Provide advice on skills such as time management. Help students track their own progress (module requirements). Provide links and encouragement to a variety of student support services (online and on site) such as the student help desk, tutoring, writing center, library, online learning orientations, counseling, and other student services.

### **K. Help to focus learning time.**

*Examples might include:* Provide a clear list of tasks and course requirements, provide time estimates for weekly activities to help keep students on track, create a course calendar, point students to time management resources if they need them.

## **Instructor Interaction**

### **A. Proactively monitor student performance.**

*Examples might include:* Use the data provided by Canvas to track student progress. Recognize positive performance. Reach out to students who are falling behind, not robustly participating, and/or are failing; provide suggestions on how they will catch up; connect them with student support services. Encourage, don't penalize. Ensure marginalized students feel supported and encouraged to participate. Recognize some students, especially men of color, struggle to reach out because of negative social stereotypes around asking for help. Remember that penalizing for absences or late assignments discourages students from persisting.

### **B. Introduce yourself.**

*Examples might include:* Share a short introductory video and invite students to do the same. Send a welcome letter. Be active in class discussion boards and chats.

### **C. Encourage interaction.**

*Examples might include:* Provide opportunities for synchronous interactions or give extra credit for virtual or in-person office hour attendance, or other forms of direct interaction with you.

### **D. Live engagement.**

*Examples might include:* Use synchronous tools and video so people see you and hear you. Use student's names. Take notes on interactions that you can refer to later when giving personal feedback to students. Provide real opportunities for students to meet with you in person. Rename office hours using student-centered language such as "student hours" or "connection hours."

### **E. Enable learning with interest.**

*Examples might include:* Find out why students enrolled in college and in your class. Help students connect class learning to their goals. Help students build on these reasons and overcome potential barriers.

**F. Provide opportunities for interaction and communication between student and instructor.**

*Examples might include:* A help forum for getting information about the class, an assigned early post or activity to ensure students are active in the course, using course management system tools to monitor student engagement and achievement, synchronous online sessions, asynchronous discussion board, emails and chat.

**G. Provide opportunities for students to contact the faculty for support.**

*Examples might include:* In-person office hours; online office hours using tools such as web conferencing, chat, or other online messaging tools; email, phone, social media.

**H. Establish a clear and humanized sense of instructor presence in the class.**

*Examples might include:* Instructor-created videos or voice, a photo of the instructor, an introduction to the instructor, instructor participation in online discussion boards as appropriate, instructor announcements.

**I. Provide opportunities for students to give meaningful feedback.**

*Examples might include:* “Get to know you” surveys, informal surveys of students’ experiences in online or virtual learning, optional check-in or mid-semester surveys, student reflections on learning, open discussion, anonymous optional class evaluation surveys.

## Peer Interaction

**A. Provide opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration among students.**

*Examples might include:* Threaded discussion forums, synchronous (live) online interactions, group projects, peer reviews, peer presentations, idea generation, group problem solving, peer feedback/grading exercises, open assignments.

**B. Establish norms for appropriate interaction.**

*Examples might include:* Provide examples of appropriate critical and supportive comments, share or collaboratively create ground rules for communication (e.g. netiquette), encourage broad participation and diverse viewpoints, respond/intervene when students are inappropriate or inaccurate.

**C. Foster relationships and a sense of community.**

*Examples might include:* For synchronous meetings where camera use is optional, encourage students to turn on their camera — seeing each other and the instructor (via live video) improves relationships and engagement, but students may have limited access or reasons not to share, so flexibility is important. Highlight opportunities to engage outside of class: online study groups, group projects, virtual meet-ups, class social media, etc.

## Content and Assessment

### **A. Provide rich, high-quality, engaging course content.**

*Examples might include:* Provide materials that are current, rich, and sufficient in breadth and depth. Provide content from multiple sources, including OER resources and instructor-created and class-specific content. Allow students to have a role in shaping and/or creating course content. Connect content to students lives and real-world applications. Provide content that sparks curiosity, supports dialogue, and encourages critical thinking and problem-solving.

### **B. Be thoughtful in selecting course texts.**

*Examples might include:* Select material that is inclusive and validating for all students. Be conscious of the voices and imagery which prevail in your course content. Consider adopting Zero or Low Cost material for your classes.

### **C. Use inclusive course images.**

*Examples might include:* Be thoughtful and inclusive with the images you select to include in your online class material. You may need to seek out imagery that is inclusive of a range of folks of various races, ethnicities, ages, genders, abilities, and sexual orientations.

### **D. Help students develop critical thinking and/or problem-solving skills.**

*Examples might include:* Exercises applying course skills to real-world or academic problems, activities analyzing content, activities requiring students to synthesize and create, reflection and self-evaluative activities, peer instructional opportunities.

### **E. Provide content and activities supporting a variety of communication modalities and student learning preferences.**

*Examples might include:* Screencasts navigating students through the class, textual explanations of video and audio material, videos of lectures or other content, providing multiple versions of material for different preferences, providing additional materials to support remedial or advanced learners, providing assignment completion options when possible to students.

### **F. Include ongoing strategies to measure content knowledge and skills.**

*Examples might include:* Weekly low-stakes quizzes, automatically graded assignments, quizzes, tests, or projects.

### **G. Create assignments designed to encourage students to do their best work.**

*Examples might include:* Large assignments broken into multiple steps over time, activities situated in authentic contexts, assignments requiring personal perspectives and/or reflection, assignments requiring instructor or peer review of a draft, use of plagiarism detection software, assignments incorporating self-evaluation.



**H. Provide resources that are clearly linked to the activities on which students will be assessed.**

*Examples might include:* Rubrics, grading guidelines, assignment practice, low-stakes quizzes.

**I. Link course content and activities to student learning outcomes.**

*Examples might include:* An introduction to each module/unit of study that includes key outcomes and descriptions of how the course content and activities help students achieve the outcomes; a syllabus component or study guide that links outcomes, content, and assignments.

**J. Use variable assignments.**

*Examples might include:* Follow Universal Design for Learning principles such as providing options for how students demonstrate assignment outcomes. Consider allowing videos, PowerPoint presentations, even songs or poems when appropriate, along with traditional assessment types such as essays and quizzes. Enable creative engagement without lowering standards.

**K. Use assessment strategies that focus on continuous improvement and progress toward demonstrating proficiency by the end of the course.**

*Examples might include:* Smaller more frequent assignments are likely to work better than a couple of high-stakes assessments. Ask your students. Include variable ways in which students can complete an assignment (multimedia, creative performance, non-text-based assignments). Give credit for effort. Give personalized feedback along the way.

**L. Provide opportunities for interaction between student and content.**

*Examples might include:* An assigned early post or activity to ensure students are active in the course; short video lectures/screencasts; other forms of multimedia created by the instructor, a publisher, or obtained as an open educational resource.

**M. Provide opportunities for students to engage in a variety of types of learning activities.**

*Examples might include:* Webquests, internet searches, presentations, group meetings, video with assessments, audio lectures, reflection, self- and peer-assessment, activities at various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, adaptive learning activities, etc.

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## PART III: PRINCIPLES

# Principles for Good Practice and Equity-Minded Teaching in Online Education

*The following principles and online class quality indicators were collected by the MiraCosta Online Educators committee to help faculty develop and redesign online classes and foster conversation in departments about effective practices in online education.*

## Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

*The following are designed to help faculty apply **Chickering and Gamson's seminal Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education** to online classes.*

### 1. Encourages student-faculty contact

- Providing opportunities for interaction and communication between student and instructor.
- Providing opportunities for students to contact the faculty for support.
- Establishing a clear and humanized sense of instructor presence in the class.
- Initiating contact with students.

### 2. Encourages cooperation among students

- Creating an environment that is intellectually and socially safe for learning.
- Providing opportunities for (student-to-student) interaction and communication student to student, as appropriate to the class.
- Providing opportunities for collaboration among students, as appropriate to the class.
- Establishing norms for appropriate interaction.

### 3. Encourages active learning

- Providing opportunities for interaction between student and content.
- Providing opportunities for students to engage in a variety of types of learning activities.

### 4. Gives prompt feedback

- Including ongoing strategies to measure content knowledge and skills.
- Providing opportunities for students to receive appropriate feedback about their performance.

## 5. Emphasizes time on task

- Organizing class content and navigation to facilitate use.
- Helping to focus learning time.
- Using available and supported technologies.
- Providing resources that are clearly linked to the activities on which students will be assessed.
- Linking course content and activities to student learning outcomes.

## 6. Communicates high expectations

- Providing clear class information.
- Helping students develop critical thinking and/or problem-solving skills.
- Creating assignments designed to encourage students to do their best work.

## 7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

- Providing content and activities supporting a variety of communication modalities and student learning preferences.
- Ensuring content and activities are accessible to the greatest extent possible and in compliance with MiraCosta, state, federal, and accreditation policies and regulations.
- Providing links and encouragement to a variety of student support services (online and on site).
- Providing opportunities for students to give meaningful feedback on their experience in the class.
- Fostering a respectful and inclusive class climate.

# Five Equity Practices for Teaching Online

*The following is a summary of key equity practices identified by **Dr. Luke Wood** in his keynote address at the 2018 Online Teaching Conference.*

## 1. Be Intrusive

- *Performance monitoring:* Use the data provided by Canvas to find students that may be falling behind.
- *Intervening:* Use Canvas features to reach out to students that appear in danger of not succeeding. Encourage, don't penalize.
- *Mandatory interactions:* Require or give extra credit for virtual or in-person office hour attendance, or other forms of direct interaction with you.

- *Proactive advice:* Don't assume students have skills to succeed online. Encourage and facilitate use of resources such as tutoring and technical support. Provide advice on skills such as time management.

## 2. Be Relational

- *Live engagement:* Use synchronous tools and video so people see you and hear you. Use student's names. Take notes on interactions that you can refer to later when giving personal feedback to students.
- *Learning with interest:* Find out why students enrolled in college and in your class. Help students connect class learning to their goals. Help students build on these reasons and overcome potential barriers.
- *In-person engagement:* Provide real opportunities for students to meet with you in person.
- *Personalized feedback:* Make sure students know that you care about their learning by authentically affirming their bigger picture goals in the context of specific class- or assignment-related feedback.

## 3. Be Relevant

- *Course texts:* Select material that is inclusive and validating for all students. Be conscious of the voices and imagery which prevail in your course content.
- *Variable assignments:* Following Universal Design for Learning principles, provide options for how students demonstrate assignment outcomes. Consider allowing videos, PowerPoint presentations, even songs or poems when appropriate, along with traditional assessment types such as essays and quizzes. Enable creative engagement without lowering standards.
- *Leadership opportunities:* Set strong social presence expectations for students through authentic sharing in online discussions. Allow students to lead discussions and incorporate personal life experiences in online discussion.
- *Course images:* As with course text selection, also be thoughtful and inclusive with the images you select to include in your online class material. You may need to seek out imagery that is inclusive of a range of folks of various races, ethnicities, ages, genders, abilities, and sexual orientations.

## 4. Be Community-Centric

- *Introduction forums:* Seek to create a sense of community and shared learning through relationship-building in introductory discussions online.
- *Shared reflections and perspectives:* Enable students to think critically and reflect on content, and to deepen class community by sharing these reflections. Extend reflections on content to how the learning can improve personal lives and communities.

## 5. Be Race-Conscious

- *Address microaggressions:* Monitor online discussions and intervene if/when [microaggressions](#) appear.
- *Embrace race discourse:* Be intentional about discussion of issues of race and racism.

## Eight Online Course Quality Indicators

*The following online class quality indicators were developed based on quantitative and qualitative cross-institutional studies conducted by the **National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements (DETA)** at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.*

### 1. Design

- Specific and measurable learning objectives
- Alignment to assessments and learning activities
- Authentic, real-world experiences

### 2. Organization

- Well-organized course
- Easy to navigate
- Logical and consistent format
- Alignment between topics and subtopics
- Manageable sections

### 3. Support

- Manage students expectations
- Provide orientation to the course (purpose, format, and getting started)
- Illustrate alignment of objectives, assessments, and activities
- Clear instructions and directions
- Description of grading and assessment plan

### 4. Clarity

- Reduce barriers to learning
- Provide clarity in the expectations of student activity (participation and performance)
- Include explanations, descriptions, standards, requirements, guidelines, and context

## **5. Instructor Interaction**

- Express interest in student learning
- Actively participate in online discussions
- Facilitate learning and peer interaction
- Expand students' thoughts and knowledge
- Provide new prompts and additional content
- Provide timely and detailed feedback on assessments and student inquiries

## **6. Peer Interaction**

- Facilitate active learning through frequent and ongoing peer involvement and meaningful collaborative work
- Provide opportunities and technologies available for students to learn from each other

## **7. Content Interaction**

- Strategically enhance the student interaction with accessible and interactive content (preferably OER)
- Support dialogue, critical reflection and analysis, and real-world applications of the content
- Provide materials that are current, rich, and sufficient in breadth and depth
- Identify important topics and provide context

## **8. Richness**

- Provide richness in learning materials and activities, support and instructions, instructor interactions, and tools and media