

# Center for Teaching + Learning

Teaching is hard. It helps to have partners.

Our work at the Center for Teaching + Learning here at Stephens College is all about connection, collaboration, and empowerment. We aim to help grow the teaching and learning culture for the benefit of instructors, students, and the college as a whole. That work can take all kinds of shapes.

We are here to be a partner in wherever your teaching adventures take you. Our work ranges from program planning to course design to a casual chat over coffee about that idea you had that you are not sure what to do with, but you can't bring yourself to let go.

Let's talk. Click on the contact form or use the email at the bottom of this page to reach out. We are always happy to hear from you.

[Request 1:1 Consultation](#)

## Some specific areas we can help with...

**Course Design:** What does your course look like as we transition to block scheduling?

**Ideation:** Do you have an idea for your class? One of our specialties is helping folks bring ideas to life.

**Authentic Assessments:** How do you design projects and activities that reflect the skills you need your learners to master for the working world?

**Taming Canvas:** Canvas can be an ally or an enemy. Sometimes both at the same time! We know Canvas. And while IT is better equipped to do Canvas trainings, we can help with Canvas taming.

**Department Talks:** Does your department have a shared teaching need? We are happy to facilitate conversations, offer workshops, or serve your team in any way we can.

**Thought Partner:** Do you just need someone to chat about college teaching life? We are here for that.

## Resources

[Block Planner - Topics](#)

This planner gives space to write out your goals or vision for the course, and then offers a calendar of 18 days to shape and spread how the central topics of your course might fit on the block timetable.

[Block Planner - Hourly](#)

A good rule of practice on the block is switching tasks every 30 minutes to help keep energy up for the class. This planner segments 18 days into 30-minute increments for detailed block planning.




# WHAT GOES WHERE? sequencing online content



**Make it easy to engage, disengage, then re-engage when organizing your online course.** You've got your assignments, discussions, videos, readings and all that good stuff and are ready to build your course in Canvas. But...*where does all that stuff go?* Does the sequencing actually matter, or can you just kinda toss everything out there in a big ol' pile and it will be fine? Sequencing matters because it gives the learners a path to engage with you, each other, and the content. Online isn't like a 75 minute lecture course with a scheduled start and stop time. Learners will jump in and out of the materials over time. **Work within that assumption to build on ramps and off ramps to maintain engagement.**

## MAP IT


Create a short checklist of all the things that need to be done for that module and add it to the beginning. Make it downloadable. You can even create an **overview page** that gives a summary of what, where, why, and introduces the topics. Knowing these expectations helps learners plan their work time.



Wk2 Overview
READ - WATCH - ENGAGE
My Favorite Articles on Measurement - READ & WATCH
Measurement Schmeasurement.pdf

## CHUNK IT


Learners will be engaging and re-engaging with your module over time. Make it easy by keeping videos under 15 minutes each. This lets them engage, walk away, and have an clear re-entry point. **Name the videos** so it's obvious what they cover which helps in revisiting materials. If you use long-format audio like podcasts, make sure they are downloadable so learners can take them on the go.



R STUDIO PRACTICE
The Basics: Installing and Using R Studio - WATCH
Cleaning Your Data - WATCH
tidyr.pdf
Diagnostics and Understanding Assumptions - WATCH

## ARRANGE IT

You can order your materials in sequence; do this reading first, watch this video second, discussion third, etc. Or you can have collections of like-materials. A "Read & Watch" section with articles and videos, then an **"Assignments"** section with all the assignments. Use the headers in Canvas to keep things organized. Avoid putting all the materials on a single page because too many items on one page will lead to things getting missed due to cognitive overload.



ASSIGNMENTS
Cleaning Your Data - It's Filthy Apr 30   10 pts
What's Wrong with p-hacking in Research? Mar 31   17 pts
Wk2 Summary and NEXT Steps

# Make it easy to engage, disengage, then re-engage.





# HELLO. MY NAME IS welcoming and connecting



**Connection makes and breaks online courses.** Fostering connection is the single most meaningful thing instructors can do to motivate and engage with their learners. And it can be really hard to do. But when learners see their online instructors as approachable, encouraging, and caring they are far more likely to thrive. Those positive interactions cultivate a sense of belonging in the classroom, the university, and the discipline. There's no "right" way to connect, just be your authentic self. **In this space, doing the work to connect matters more than the specific path to connection.** Here are a few ideas on how to do that work.

## THE BEGINNING

**Relentless Welcome:** A welcome letter, an "about your instructor" video, and even an introductions discussion forum can all communicate that you are excited to connect with your learners.

**Name Stories:** Name stories offer the learners a chance to introduce themselves. Ask: Who gave you your name and why? What name do you prefer to be called? Pronunciation tips. Pronouns. And what do you already know about the class topic?

**Who We Are:** A short welcome survey can give instructors context for who their learners are and what they are curious about for the class. Ask about topic interest, future plans, and what they might be nervous about for this course.

## THE MIDDLE

**Midterm Check:** Create an anonymous survey that asks what's working in the class, what would make it better, and if there's anything else they would like you to know. Then address that feedback directly so learners know you're listening.

**Announcements:** An announcement can set the tone for the week. You can also use these to highlight questions from the week along with great ideas from your learners. Try a video announcement for some additional humanization and fun.

**Join Discussions:** Learners don't see you reading their discussion forum posts. They only see the comments you make. Use your comments to not only encourage critical thinking, but to direct learners to others in the class who are sharing great ideas.

## THE END

**Consultations:** If your course has a final project or paper, consider having group or individual project consultations (on Zoom) where learners can get feedback directly from you early in the process. Make sure they bring their draft!

**Review Sessions:** The most well attended Zoom sessions are always the ones where the instructor is hosting an exam review. These reviews are helpful by themselves, but also offer a path to connection.

**One Thing:** Create a discussion forum and ask everyone, instructors included, for a 100-word reflection that captures or builds on the most meaningful topic, project, interaction, or idea from your semester together.

# Connection makes and breaks online courses.





# VIDEO KILLED THE LECTURE STAR

## creating videos for online courses



**Creating videos is about connection.** Maybe there are YouTube influencers who enjoy seeing themselves on video, but for most college instructors teaching online seeing yourself on video is cringe-inducing. But creating instructional videos for online courses is not about the performance or production or even the content. It's about instructors connecting with learners, and learners connecting with the course. **Instructional videos are a popular and powerful mechanism for fostering meaningful learning. They can also help learners realize there is a person on the other side of the LMS who is advocating for their success.** Here's a few thoughts on making videos that get watched.

### VIDEO TYPES

**Lecture Videos:** Shorter is better. Find logical break points in your topic and make several shorter videos instead of a single long one.

**Assignment Expectations:** Create videos to unpack both the assignment and your expectations for how learners might go about completing the assignment.

**Validate & Motivate:** Use announcements and discussion replies for quick videos that highlight great ideas from students (by name) that week. These quick, filmed on your phone, videos can be wildly motivating for learners.

### TECH TIPS

**Audio:** Solid sound is the foundation for a video. A microphone or earbuds will work better to focus your voice than the built-in mic on your computer.

**Lighting:** Face windows and use lamps to give strong lighting for your videos. Try to avoid recording with windows behind you, as that can be problematic for camera focus.

**Slides:** Use as few words as you can and make them as BIG as possible. Assume learners are watching this on their phones, so make sure they can read any text you put on the screen.

### YOU CAN DO THIS

**Be (EXTRA) You:** The camera drains the energy out of you. What would be lively in person can seem flat on video. Be you, just be the most excitable and passionate version of you that you can muster up. Yes, it will feel weird, but it will work to add some extra spark to your videos.

**Change Location:** Who says all videos need to be from your desk and have slides? Take your phone out and about to film around your neighborhood, on location, or to give a demonstration. Sometimes just getting outside can help take the anxiety out of being on video.

**Just Relax:** Easier said than done, I know, but the truth is high production value doesn't equate to learning. You won't be perfect, nor should you try to be. Just be yourself and roll with the mishaps, pet interruptions, and fumbled words. Embrace knowing that the most important thing is connection, not perfection.

# Creating videos is about connection.





# TILT YOUR SELF

## clear assignment instructions



**Transparent instructions prevent “read my mind” games.** It’s easy for online assignments to inadvertently become exercises in clairvoyance. The challenge of writing clear assignment instructions for online is that there’s little space for spontaneous correction. It’s harder to yell out, “what I meant by that was...” when you don’t have a classroom. But writing clear instructions means learners spend less energy figuring out what you want, and more energy doing the work of learning. It also means less emails asking for clarification. The **Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT)** framework is helpful here. Developed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes and colleagues, this framework enables you to make the assessment process explicit and equitable for learners by clarifying *how* students are supposed to complete an assignment and *why* the assignment is relevant. **You don’t need to change your assignments, just reframe how you explain your expectations by discussing the three areas of the TiLT framework: purpose, task, and criteria.**

### PURPOSE

What skills or content knowledge will learners practice by doing this assignment? How can learners use this in life beyond the context of this course? You know why you’re asking them to do this specific work, just explain that value to your learners.

### TASK

This is what learners do and how they do it. What should learners do first, and what are the recommended next steps? What common mistakes should learners avoid? You’re not “coddling” learners by explaining this, you’re communicating your expectations clearly.

### CRITERIA

Are learners on the right track and doing what’s expected? Provide worked examples and discuss what makes them successful. Rubrics can be helpful to identify what components are required, and how to best demonstrate those components.

# Transparent instructions prevent “read my mind” games.





# PLEASE UNMUTE live sessions for online



**Live sessions are opportunities to highlight learner voices.** When someone mentions live, or synchronous, sessions for online classes is your first mental image "zoom school?" Is it followed by a shudder of fear? Live sessions are tricky because they require us to do more than just talk at the screen for 50 or 75 minutes. **Live sessions can be fun and meaningful experiences, but they need to go beyond "live lectures" to foster connection.** Videos are a great approach to one-way lectures. Live is opportunity for interaction as it can mean less instructor talk and more learner voices. **Live sessions offer new ways to get our students to engage with the content, with instructors, and with peers.** Here are some ideas for your next live session.

## PLANNING

**Agenda:** Live sessions need planning. Organization through charisma will only let you down. Create an agenda for the time and detail the plan in 5-10 minute increments to keep moving and prevent lulls.

**Rituals:** Create rituals you repeat every session to signal transitions. So a welcome ritual ("Rose, Bud, Thorn"), mid-meeting (7th Inning Stretch), or ending ritual (most memorable moment from today).

**15 Minute Limit:** Do something different every 15 minutes. (Maybe sooner!) If you're talking, switch to something else. Change gears to keep momentum.

## BUILT-IN

**Chat:** Don't ignore the chat! Chat allows learners talk amongst themselves and ask questions through the comfort of text. Try a "chat waterfall" for a different approach to whole class engagement.

**Breakout Rooms:** BRs are like salt: a little goes a long way and too much burns. Give explicit directions about what to do while in BRs and SHORT time limits before bringing everyone back to recap.

**Polling:** A quick poll can check for understanding in the space. It can also be an option for seeing where your learners want to go that day.

## INTERACTION

**Embrace Interruptions:** Curious cats and cute kids are fun reminders of our shared humanity. Embrace these "interruptions" and let folks be whole people together. There's no shame in an integrated life.

**Bring Something:** When meeting with individuals or small groups, ask them to bring something to the meeting. Bring a draft, bring a half-completed formula, just bring something to work through together to make the meeting practical and directed.

**Shared Docs:** Use tools like Google Doc & Slides to work together during live sessions. These give a concreteness to interactive activities like brainstorming, presenting, drafting, and sharing.

**Say Hello:** I was in ONE meeting ONE time when the dean of the college personally said "hello" by name to all 20 people in the meeting. It set an amazing tone for the conversation. It was such a simple, impactful, and atypical experience I have never forgotten it.

# Live sessions are opportunities to highlight learner voices.





# QUESTION?

## level-up your quizzes



True or false: Quizzes are too elementary for college. There all are kinds of innovative authentic assessments out there for instructors to implement. But sometimes a classic is a classic for a reason. **The humble quiz can be a powerful tool for both assessment and learning.** Taking a quiz is a process of recall, and that recall can help ideas to stick in the brain. Sure quizzes generally have grades and points, but a quiz for learning builds knowledge. And with knowledge built, learners can use that in deeper application of ideas. **There are ways to make quizzes that provoke more learning and feel less like busywork.** Here are a few ideas.

### COLUMN A

**Question Banks:** A good question bank is worth its weight in gold. When used with multiple attempts, the banks can serve different questions for every quiz, every time a learner takes and retakes the quiz.

**Multiple Attempts:** Every time a learner answers a quiz question they are remembering information. The more often they work on remembering, the more likely that info will move to long-term memory.

**Check for Understanding:** A quiz doesn't have to be at the end of a unit, they can be in the middle too. Use quizzes as a check-for-understanding practices after (or during!) lecture videos or readings.

**Pre-Testing:** A quiz can be a pre-test to help learners identify what they know and don't know about a topic. But just count this as complete, no need to put points on concepts they haven't learned yet.

### COLUMN B

**Retrieval Practice:** Asking questions (from banks!) about previously covered content in every quiz will help that learning stick. Your learners will hate it, but it will help them master the material.

**More and low stakes:** One chance, high-stakes quizzes makes cheating more enticing. Consider having more quizzes more often to lower the pressure to always perform perfectly.

**Be clear, not tricky:** Avoid using "all of the above," "what is NOT true," and questions that use trick language or trick logic. These "gotcha" approaches are not helpful for learning.

**Group Testing:** Who says that quizzes are for individuals only? What if learners worked together to discuss and debate answers? What if they worked together AND had different quiz questions from question banks?

# A quiz for learning builds knowledge.



# TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES

## planning discussion forums



**Discussion forums hold promise for connection and meaning-making.** At the same time, the experience can often feel really far from meaningful. How does something with such potential go off the rails? A common culprit is the prompt itself. **If the prompt has a "right" answer, it's not a discussion. Discussion forums work best when they wrestle with ambiguity and interpretation.** When they are messy. And just like onsite classrooms, the instructor's role isn't to micromanage conversation but to guide learners towards critical thinking. Model that thinking and point the way forward. **Discussions can be where the heavy lifting of co-constructed learning happens, but only when they move beyond transactional interactions.**

## DESIGN

**Clarification Questions:** Ask questions to help learners dig deeper. Could you give me an example? How could we test that? Do we need to consider another point of view? What is the central idea here?

**Instructor Participation:** You don't need to reply to everyone always, but engage enough so learners know you are present.

**Use Requirements Sparingly:** It's okay to have word counts or rubrics, but too many requirements and the discussion starts to look more like an assignment than a conversation.

**Due mid-week:** Having initial posts due midweek gives time to discuss before beginning the next topic.

**Ground Rules:** Clear ground rules can help keep conversations from devolving. Set expectation for positive and civil conversations and then enforce those rules kindly and consistently.

**Recap Discussions:** At the end of the discussion recap ideas in an announcement and highlight some folks who offered great contributions by name.

## FRESH IDEAS

**Video Posts & Replies:** Short video posts and replies can add a more social dynamic to what is typically a text-heavy space.

**Small Groups:** Sometimes small group conversations of 5-8 people are more engaging than whole-class conversations.

**Q+A for Demos:** Record software walkthroughs and process demonstrations, then use the discussion forum as a Q+A for learners as they work through the demonstrations.

**Ask a Question:** Instead of answering a prompt, learners can ask a question about the most confusing aspect of a reading and get support from each other.

**In the Wild:** Put those phones to work by sending learners out to photograph and document where they encounter topics from class in their daily lives.

**Meme as reply:** Not everything has to be super serious. Ask learners to create memes about class topics or readings that reflect their questions or feelings.

# Discussion forums work best when they wrestle with ambiguity





# POSITIVITY (SYLLA)BUS creating a syllabus for online



If you want learners to read the syllabus then make it a helpful read, not just an informative one. A syllabus for an online course isn't all that different from a syllabus for an onsite course. Both have the potential to guide learners through the class, and both can be ignored when uninviting. It's often where learners get their first impression of the course and of you the instructor. When the focus of a syllabus starts to become behavior control, that's going to set a me-vs-you tone. Keep the emphasis on success, guidance, and excitement for your time together to keep the tone warm. **Focus your words on highlighting an instructor who is more excited about learning than policy management.** That kind of writing might just encourage learners to read and then, re-read the syllabus.

## SIMILAR THINGS

**Warm Tone:** A welcoming tone in your writing keeps the syllabus from feeling like an invitation to confrontation or bland and dismissible legalese.

**Inclusive Language:** Welcome to OUR course! WE are going to have a great time and will learn from EACH OTHER. Learning is a co-creative process. Let your language communicate that.

**Schedule & Grades:** These are the most popular parts of any syllabus for online and onsite courses. Make sure they are clear and consistent with what shows up in the LMS.

## DIFFERENT THINGS

**Instructor Expectations:** Be explicit about how often they should check the course site, and how much engagement time each week will likely require. Talk about civility expectations for interactions.

**Learner Expectations:** Be explicit about what learners can expect from YOU! Write about things like feedback turnaround time and how you will engage with them and with the course.

**Contacting You:** Asynchronous courses don't have scheduled "class time." Give specific details about how learners can reach you in a hurry, and how soon to expect to hear a reply.

## SYLLABUS EXTRA CREDIT

**Video Highlights:** Even warm-toned text is still text. Consider creating a short "highlight" video where you talk through some of the aspects of the class you are most excited about.

**Annotate our Syllabus:** Invite learners to ask questions by annotating and commenting on the syllabus itself using Hypothesis or comments as a shared Google Doc.

**Trim the Syllabus:** What info needs to live in the syllabus and what could live in the LMS? Can you link to schedules, policies, readings, etc. instead of duplicating them in both places?

# Make it a helpful read, not just an informative one.





# CHECK PLEASE!

## opening your canvas course



**First impressions matter. Even online.** That's why you have been getting your content together, recording short talks, and creating authentic assessments for your learners. You might be ready to open your Canvas course and meet your learners, but is your course ready to be opened? Canvas makes course sites easy to change, edit, and correct even if you miss some details the first time around. **Here are a few items to check before opening day to help ensure a smooth start to your semester.**

### PUBLISH

**Everything in Canvas has to be published to be visible to learners;** pages, modules, and even the course itself. Make sure the modules and assignments you want visible to learners on Day 1 are published. When you have those ready, you can publish the course from the Home page. That opens the door to the learners.



### SET DUE DATE

**Assignment due dates are what triggers reminders for learners in Canvas.** Assignments without due dates will not be automatically added to the course calendar or learner's to-do lists. Set those up as early as possible to help learners plan their semester workload.



### CHECK LINKS

There is a single button in Canvas that will check all the links in your course with one click. Go to "Settings" and on the right side menu, click on "**Validate Links in Content**" and watch as all missing or broken links are located for you in moments. You can fix them right from the list.



### SYLLABUS

Whether you have a traditional syllabus, a liquid syllabus, or an overly verbose technical manual masquerading as a syllabus, **make sure you have a downloadable version** for learners to reference offline. While you're there, make sure it's the version for the current semester.



### HIDE NAV

Do you really need all those navigation links on the left side of your Canvas Course? Go to your course Settings page, then click Navigation at the top to **disable any unnecessary navigation options listed**. Be sure to scroll down and click that tiny "save" button at the bottom to save your navigation changes.



### WELCOME

**This is actually the most important item on this list.** Welcome your learners and let them know you're excited to be in this course together. This could be a video, photos, or anything that helps them see there's a person on the other side of Canvas who is excited they are here. This welcome sets the tone for the semester, set it warmly.



# First impressions matter. Even online.

