



A Peer Observation Guide for Fully Online Units at Western Sydney University

Background

In 1987, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson published “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” a summary of 50 years of higher education research that addressed good teaching and learning practices. Their findings, and faculty and institutional evaluation instruments based on the findings, have been widely used to guide and improve college teaching.

While instruments such as the Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE) provide a measure of student satisfaction with a course, the Seven Principles provide a useful framework to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching and learning. Therefore, this *Peer Review Guide* adapts the Seven Principles to facilitate the peer review of online courses in both undergraduate and graduate level online courses at Penn State. Each principle is described in detail, including evidence of how a principle may be met. Examples of evidence to look for and resources for additional information are also included.

The Seven Principles

Good practice:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty;
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students;
3. Encourages active learning;
4. Gives prompt feedback;
5. Emphasizes time on task;
6. Communicates high expectations; and
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin* (39) 7.

While, ideally, good practice would suggest that all seven principles would be supported in some way in an online course, variations in course format, size, and online teaching experience can make reaching that ideal difficult. This Peer Observation Review Guide provides space for the peer reviewer to take notes based on their observations of fully online courses.

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Unit: _____

Date: : _____

Principle 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and teaching staff (instructor).	Observation notes
<p>Frequent and timely student-teacher contact is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement, particularly in a distance education environment. Evidence of teacher concern helps students get through challenging situations and inspires them to persevere. Knowing a few teaching staff members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A "welcome message" is provided at the beginning of the course that encourages student-to-instructor contact for course-related discussions or concerns.• The instructor encourages and fosters a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among course participants.• The instructor initiates contact with, or respond to, students on a regular basis in order to establish a consistent online presence in the unit or communicates expectations on timing of responses (and prior notice is given to students in the event that the instructor will be unavailable for more than a few days, such as might be the case during professional travel).• A prominent announcement area is used to communicate important up-to-date course information to students, such as reminders of impending assignment due dates, curriculum changes, scheduled absences, etc.• A brief welcome video to introduce the unit and teaching staff to students.• The instructor holds regular office hours, and by appointment, that are mediated by technology (e.g. chat areas, web conferencing).• Student inquiries are responded in a timely manner. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion forums• E-mail messages• Posted announcements• Unit syllabus• Chat space <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Western Sydney University Active Learning - https://dft.westernsydney.edu.au/active-learning/• Western Sydney University Technology Enabled Learning – Learner Engagement https://dft.westernsydney.edu.au/tel/home-2/engage-2-2/• "Managing Your Online Class" - http://facdev.e-education.psu.edu/teach/manage• "Ice-breakers" - http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2002_01/index.asp• "21st Century Icebreakers: 13 Ways To Get To Know Your Students With Technology" - http://teachbytes.com/2012/08/05/21st-century-icebreakers-10-ways-to-get-to-know-your-students-with-technology/• Quality Matters rubric: https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/StandardsfromtheQMHigherEducationRubric.pdf	

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Principle 2: Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.	Peer observation notes
<p>Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular opportunities for students to engage in one or more of the following activities:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Formal and/or informal discussions of unit topics○ Collaborative unit assignments○ Study groups• A "meet one another" activity at the beginning of the course so students can begin to make personal connections.• Group assignments that follow the basic tenants of cooperative learning (see Resources, below) in order to avoid the common pitfalls of "group work."• An explanation of the criteria for "good" discussion participation.• Modeling of good discussion participation practices by the instructor.• Discussion prompts that help to guide and elicit student participation in class discussion activities.• Instructor <i>facilitation</i> of class discussions by encouraging, probing, questioning, summarizing, etc.• Student interaction space(s) for study groups, "hallway conversations," etc. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Discussion forums• E-mail messages• Learning Guide• Chat space <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "An Overview of Cooperative Learning" - http://www.co-operation.org/what-is-cooperative-learning/• "Strategies to Promote Communication Online" - http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/RESOURCES/TUTORIALS/communication/communicationStrategies.aSP• "Ice-breakers" - http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2002_01/index.asp• "21st Century Icebreakers: 13 Ways To Get To Know Your Students With Technology" - http://teachbytes.com/2012/08/05/21st-century-icebreakers-10-ways-to-get-to-know-your-students-with-technology/• "How-to Facilitate Robust Online Discussions" - https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/how-to-create-robust-discussions-online/	

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Principle 3: Good practice encourages active learning.	Peer observation notes
<p>Active learning methods engage students in the learning process by encouraging them to discover, process, and apply information. Empirical support for the positive impact of active learning on student achievement is extensive.¹</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student activities that involve one or more of the followingⁱⁱ:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Active use of writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression○ Opportunity for information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems (including the use of library, electronic/computer and other resources, and quantitative reasoning and interpretation, as applicable)○ Engagement in collaborative learning activities○ Application of intercultural and international competence○ Dialogue pertaining to social behavior, community, and scholarly conduct○ For General Education courses, three or more of these activities are integrated into courses offered in the knowledge domains (http://www.psu.edu/ufs/geic/framework.html):• Opportunities for students to “customize” their learning by tailoring assignments to their personal and professional interests and needs.• Clear alignment between learning outcomes and learning activities.• Examples of student work where they<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Think, talk, or write about their learning○ Reflect, relate, organize, apply, synthesise, or evaluate information○ Perform research, lab or studio work○ Participate in, design, or develop educational games and simulations. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning Guide• Instructional materials• Interactive learning modules• Assignment drop box/ Turnitin• Discussion forums <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Western Sydney University Active Learning - https://dft.westernsydney.edu.au/active-learning/• Western Sydney University Technology Enabled Learning – Learner Engagement https://dft.westernsydney.edu.au/tel/home-2/engage-2-2/• “Promoting Active Learning” - https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/learning-resources/promoting-active-learning• “Inquiry-based Learning” - http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/pdf/IBL.pdf• Move over Socrates: Online Discussion is Here - http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/NCP0330.pdf	

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Principle 4: Good practice gives prompt feedback.	Peer observation notes
<p>Instructors help students frequently assess their knowledge and competence and provide them with opportunities to perform, receive meaningful suggestions, and reflect on their learning.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information about feedback methods• Option (or requirement) for students to submit drafts of assignments for instructor feedback.• Meaningful feedback on student assignments that is provided within a publicised, and reasonable, time frame.• Assignment feedback that is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observable behaviour that can be changed.• Clearly communicated course and individual assignment grading criteria.• An open discussion forum where students can ask questions, and receive instructor feedback, about content and activities e.g.FAQs• Examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course syllabus• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Interactive learning modules providing immediate, corrective feedback• Assignment dropboxes and e-portfolios• Discussion forums• Survey instruments• Check-your-knowledge activities <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "5 Research-based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback" - http://www.edutopia.org/blog/tips-providing-students-meaningful-feedback-marianne-stenger• "Gives Prompt Feedback" - https://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/innovate/principles/gives-4a.html• Howard E. Aldrich. 2002. "Your Paper's on the Floor, Outside My Door." <u>National Teaching & Learning Forum</u>, 12, 1: 10.	

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Principle 5: Good education emphasises time on task.	Peer observation notes
<p>The frequency and duration of study, as well as effective time management skills, are critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning to manage and prioritise their study time.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A unit schedule that outlines topics to be covered and assignment due dates so students can plan their workload accordingly.• Information on the unit that provides an estimate of the amount of time students should spend on weekly tasks.• Time-to-completion information on unit assignments (e.g., “This assignment should take you approximately 2 hours to complete.”)• Unit-specific study tips that provide students with strategies for utilizing their time well.• Assignment feedback that provides students with information on where to focus their studies.• Assignment due dates and timeframes that take into account the nature of the target audience. For example, a unit targeted to working adult professionals might incorporate a weekend into an assignment timeframe.• Signposts in the Learning Management System (LMS) for students to help them monitor their progression through content and activities. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly folders• Learning Guide• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Interactive modules• Check-your-knowledge quizzes• Assignment dropboxes / Turnitin <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Online Course Design: Time on Task” - https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/sites/rit.edu.academicaffairs.tls/files/docs/Course%20Design_Online_Time%20on%20Task_v1.5.pdf• iStudy Module (for students) on Time Management - http://tutorials.istudy.psu.edu/timemanagement/• How Students Develop Online Learning Skills (<i>Educause Review</i>)- http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/HowStudentsDevelopOnlineLearn/157435	

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Principle 6: Good practice communicates expectations.	Peer observation notes
<p>As the saying goes, “if you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?” Effective instructors have high, but reasonable, expectations for their students. They clearly communicate those expectations and provide support to their students in their efforts to meet those expectations.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explicit communication of the skills and knowledge every student needs to have in order to be successful in the course.• Explanation of unit learning outcomes and how learning activities and assignments are designed to help students achieve those outcomes.• Frequent feedback provided to students through written explanations and detailed feedback on assignments.• Motivation and encouragement that inspires students to move past the easy answers to more complex solutions.• Routine use of critical and probing questions when communicating with students about course assignments and activities.• Examples and non-examples of high quality work, along with a discussion of the differences between these.• Examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning Guide• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Assignment dropboxes or Turnitin <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Student Learning Goals and Outcomes” - http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/developingstudentlearninggoalsobjectives.pdf• “Assessing and Grading Student Writing” - http://www.units.miamioh.edu/writingcenter/facultyresources/Grading.html• Authentic Assessment Toolbox - http://ifmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm	

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Principle 7: Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.	Peer observation notes
<p>People bring different talents and styles of learning to the learning environment. Some bring a wealth of relevant experience to a course, while others may be new to the topic at hand. Likewise, students who are strong in a discussion situation may be less adept at lab or studio work. Students need the opportunity to demonstrate their talents and to “personalise” their learning so that it is relevant to them. It is also important to give students opportunities to learn in ways that may be less comfortable in order to improve their learning skills.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of a variety of assessment tools that gauge student progress.• Alternative assignment options that allow students to demonstrate their progress in a manner that is best conducive to their talents. For example, a video may be allowed as learning evidence instead of a written paper.• Supplemental online materials are provided to students who lack prerequisite knowledge or who would benefit from having content presented in an alternative manner.• Timely, corrective feedback for online activities.• A positive online climate where students are encouraged to seek assistance with course content and learning activities if needed.• Accommodations are proactively offered for students with disabilities. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning Guide• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Assignment dropboxes / Turnitin• Interactive modules• Check-your-knowledge quizzes • Discussion forums <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Learning effectively by understanding your learning preferences” – http://www.mindtools.com/mnemlsty.html• “Classroom Assessment Techniques” - https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/• Western Sydney University Disability Service https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/disability_service	

¹ Prince, M. (July 2004). Does active learning work? A review of the research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93, 3, 223-232.

² Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs (2001). A clarification of ‘active learning’ as it applies to general education (Legislative). Located at <http://senate.psu.edu/scca/curricular%20affairs%20reports/2-01%20CA%20RPT%202.pdf>