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# Best Practices for Online Instruction at Moorpark College

### Development Process: 2014 - Present

The Distance Education Advisory Committee was convened by the Executive Vice President in Fall 2014. The Best Practices Workgroup convened immediately thereafter. Throughout Fall and Spring 2014, the faculty workgroup, including Rachel Messenger, Cindy Reed and Joanna Miller consulted numerous existing Best Practice documents from other California community and state colleges. In Fall 2015, the group reconvened, joined by Martin Chetlen. The present version was approved by the Distance Education Committee on Oct. 28, 2015.

### Resources:

The development of these Best Practices was informed and guided by regulatory requirements in the [California Education Code, Title V](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Browse/Home/California/CaliforniaCodeofRegulations?guid=ICD714E20D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)), the [Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](http://www.section508.gov/content/learn/laws-and-policies), and the [Copyright Act and Fair Use](http://copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html), and the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index.html) Members of the group also relied on guidance from the [Academic Senate for California Community Colleges Accreditation Institute](http://www.asccc.org/events/2015-02-20-180000-2015-02-21-200000/2015-accreditation-institute), along with the Faculty Handbook of the [Accrediting Commission for California Junior and Community Colleges, and their Guide to Evaluating Distance Education Courses](http://www.accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Guide_to_Evaluating_DE_and_CE_2013.pdf), and the [California Community Colleges Distance Education Report 2013](http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/reportsTB/REPORT_DistanceEducation2013_090313.pdf).

These best practices align with the ACCJC Accreditation requirements for Regular and Effective Practice and Student Engagement. This document is designed as an informational resource for online faculty.

# Best Practices for Online Instruction at Moorpark College

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*The following tenets are recommended as best practices in online course design and instruction at Moorpark College. This document is to be reviewed and updated annually, as needed. This document is designed as an informational resource for online faculty. A supplemental document that will provide examples of implemented best practices is to be developed.*

General Course Information – **In online courses at Moorpark College, the following information should be provided within the course shell. Some information should additionally be provided and available to students prior to the start of the semester.**

### Course Syllabus includes:

●   **General Description**-The college/instructor name, contact information, course information, technology requirements, grading standards, attendance/sign-in requirements, required materials and/or equipment, statements of responsibility, course policies, services related to special accommodations (ACCESS), student learning outcomes/objectives, academic integrity, critical dates (related to registration, drop deadlines, etc.), and a “subject to change” statement.

●   **Learning Resources** - Textbook and other resource requirements are included along with links or information on how or where to purchase.

●   **Technology** - Equipment (e.g. headphones, microphone) and software requirements, recommended high-speed internet connection are described.

●   **Communication –** Instructor contact information (preferably including at least two means of contact), office hours (if applicable), instructor response time for student inquiries, mode of communication (through email, phone or other contact).

●   **Expectations** - Requirements for success, including required sign-ins, expected hours of work per week, synchronous meetings if any, field trips, communication standards, netiquette policy for expectations in course correspondence, etc.

●   **Learning Objectives** - Defined, measurable and consistent with course competencies.

●   **Content-** Delivery and submission methods are defined (e.g. course assignments and requirements are delivered through the Content tool on the CMS and all deliverables are submitted online through CMS rather than email, etc.)

●   **Grading Policy** - A detailed explanation of grading policy that describes point/percentage requirements for assignments or other course assessments, and configuration of the overall letter grade, or other descriptive parameters. (e.g. participation is equal to 20% of your course grade.)

●   **Academic Integrity Policy** - Explain expectations for academic integrity, course policy on cheating and plagiarism, and consequences for violations. Consider using Turnitin.com for assessing academic integrity and reducing plagiarism.

●   **Course Access** - For continuity, the institution’s learning management system is used as the course gateway (even if a publisher’s site or content is used for the actual course).

●   **Critical Dates -** A list of dates such as last day to add, last day to drop, course orientation, etc.

●   **Proctoring** - If required, state times and dates and provide information on how online students can contact an authorized proctor.

●   **ACCESS** statement and other student resources for disabled students.

**Course Design**

*All of the Course Information, including the syllabus, should be provided inside the course shell in the form of links, modules and accessible documents. Documents may be created in accessible html course files inside the LMS, and if desired, an attached .pdf may be included. In addition, the following information should be considered when designing an online course.*

●   **Navigation** – The course is intuitive and easy to navigate. It is clear to students where to begin and how to progress through the course. Instructions and possible assessment to measure understanding of navigation are available to help students familiarize themselves with the course shell. For example, a navigation quiz or assignment, a course orientation quiz, a course feature scavenger hunt, etc. can assess student understanding and participation in the first days of the course.

●   **Start Here –** Students can easily determine the initial course steps  (i.e. students know what to do and where to go when they enter the course).  There is a course module or note that provides clear instructions on what to do first and next.

●   **Course Orientation**- A course orientation in some mode, whether onsite in person, online live synchronous, or online asynchronous, is an important initial first step to inform students on course practices, policies and expectations. (If orientation is synchronous, instructor should submit schedule notes to the online course schedule. Additionally, alternative arrangements should be available to students who may have conflicts with other classes, such as a recorded archive of the orientation. (Available free through [CCCConfer.org](http://www.cccconfer.org/).) The orientation could be considered the onsite classroom equivalent of leading students through the syllabus on the first day of class. Instructors may use a type of graded, required activity to assess understanding and ensure student participation.

●   **Instructor introduction and contact** - The instructor provides a self-introduction with a short video, or text and photo within the course shell. Instructor contact information is prominent and visible inside the course, and includes multiple means of contact. An Instructor Contact widget may be added.

●   **Learning Modules -** Course content is broken down (chunked) into clearly labeled and manageable units or modules, e.g. by date, subject, unit, or whatever design makes sense for the individual class. Modules include links to all course materials and activities contained within each unit. (Each unit includes a link to any quizzes, discussions and assignments related to a particular module or unit.) This helps reduce cognitive load and eliminate barriers as students do not have to search the course for the requirements for that unit.) Each learning module includes a learning objective.

**Assessment**

*Assessing student participation and progress promptly and regularly is essential to good course design and instruction, and promotes student retention and success. Early assessments in the first weeks tell the instructor which students are participating and which students may need additional prompting. Additionally, student feedback to the instructor at midterm can provide valuable information when considering course modifications and updating.*

●   **Assessment** - Provide detailed description, rubrics or criteria for evaluating student work. Students know what is expected to earn a grade of “A,” for example.

●   **Assessment Process** - Identify and explain assessment policy and procedures, and how grades are configured. Provide multiple means of assessment, e.g. exams, essays, discussions, group or individual projects, etc.

●  **Learning objectives** – Assignments and activities include objectives that are aligned to the course outline of record. Each assignment and activity is aligned to one or more objectives.

●   **Grade Book** – Students have access online to their grades, which are continuously updated so that they can track their progress throughout the course.

●   **Course Survey** - Provide a tool that captures student feedback about the course, e.g. a suggestion box or anonymous survey. Consider seeking feedback during the course so that corrections can be made, in addition to a course completion survey.

**Instructor-Initiated Contact, Regular, Effective and Substantial**

*Instructors should maintain regular, effective, and substantial contact and interaction with students as a best practice and to remain in compliance with ACCJC accreditation standards and federal student aid requirements. To promote student success and engage students who may feel isolated in online courses, instructors should promote interactivity through frequent communication and instructor-initiated contact.*

●   **Welcome Letter –** A welcome letter or other pre-course correspondence informs students about textbooks and/or other material, scheduled orientations, how to find their online course shell, when they can access the course shell, and where to begin inside the course shell. The letter may be sent one or two weeks ahead of the course start date, but should be resent just before the semester begins to capture newly registered students. Guide students to  [www.moorparkcollege](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/distance/).edu/destudents for general distance education information. In general, course shells open one week before classes begin. Students may be invited to look around the course or even begin an introductory discussion before the course begins.

●   **Instructor-led Orientation –** Instructor-led orientation, whether onsite, live synchronous online, or asynchronous in video or audio file (all available through CCCConfer.org) provides guidance for course expectations and establishes instructor presence from the outset.

●   **Announcements/News/Homepage/Bulletin Board Posts** – News or another tool within the LMS is used for regular instructor posts to provide updates on course content, reminders of assignment deadlines, or other information. Consider posting as often as you require students to sign in. Consider requiring students to change course notifications inside the LMS course shell so they receive an email/text when instructor has posted a News item.

●   **Discussion Boards** – Students have frequent and regular graded opportunities to interact or collaborate. Instructors post regularly on graded and non-graded discussion boards to help guide student conversations, and, when needed, to correct erroneous statements. Instructor is guiding student discussion, using discretion on when to insert or intervene, just as in an onsite classroom setting.

●   **Lecture –** The course may include instructor-generated lecture or introduction to publisher content to increase student understanding of content and to establish and promote a sense of instructor presence. (e.g. CCCConfer.org live, or use CCCConfer.org or other software to create a pre-recorded video, lecture with voice over PowerPoint, or other presentation, video lecture, lecture with audio, illustration, text, etc.)

●   **Assignment Feedback** – Instructor provides prompt and substantive feedback for graded items or revisions. Prompt feedback also encourages student retention and success through reinforcement of achievement, and can prompt interaction between instructor and students.

●   **Chat Rooms –** Location and type of use are specified, e.g. for questions, office hours, etc.

●   **Email Communication** – Students are greeted with a welcome letter prior to the start of class and email may be used for continued contact throughout the semester to notify students of general class updates, introduce the week’s materials, reinforce news announcements, provide reminders of deadlines, etc. Emails also can be used to conduct private one-on-one communication. Instructors may use their district email. They may also use the LMS email tool, Class list tool, or other tool to provide a file of sent emails for instructor records, and to enable ease of contact verification for accreditation visits or evaluations.

●   **Social Media –** Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Google Hangouts, Tumblr, etc.) may be used to enhance communication and reach students where they spend time. Instructors are mindful that some students may not have or want access to social media (e.g. Requiring that students follow an instructor on Twitter for announcements would require students to provide information to a third-party. Additionally, any graded material must not be publicly viewable to be compliant with the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index.html)

●   **SMS messaging –** Texting through applications (such as Remind or Google Voice) creates contact with students in a medium with which they are familiar.

●   **Collaboration Sites –** Many sites (Blogs, Wikis, Google docs) provide additional opportunities for student collaboration. Instructor should specify how sites will be used in the class, with consideration for FERPA, e.g. set share to: “Only those with the link can view.”

●   **Online Office Hours –** Applications inside the LMS (chat rooms) or outside Instant messaging, CCC Confer, Microsoft Lync, Google Hangouts, etc.) could provide a medium for meetings with students.

●   **Scheduled Online or Face-to-Face Meetings** **–** Synchronous Orientations, Review Periods, explanation of assignments, Office Hours, etc.)

●   **Telephone Communication –** Specify whether this is available, and provide contact information e.g. Lync office number that can forward to mobile or another number, if desired.

**Student-to-Student Interaction**

*Providing regular opportunities for students to interact in an online class is important to engage students and make them feel part of a classroom community. To engage online students who often feel isolated in distance education courses, instructors should promote interactivity among students.*

●   **Discussion –** Students have regular opportunities for graded interaction with classmates based on instructor prompts. (Graded discussions produce greater student engagement and participation.) Instructor sets expectations and/or provides rubric for expectations of the depth of posts and responses, the number of posts and responses, whether sources are required, etc.

●   **Chat room/Virtual Meeting Spaces –** Students have regular opportunities (Chat inside the LMS or in outside protected spaces like Google Hangouts) for to meet and discuss course topics or projects with classmates.

●   **Group assignments –** Students have opportunities for graded collaborative work within assigned groups. Group work online, which can be facilitated with tools provided inside the LMS (group assignments, discussions, lockers), or outside the LMS (Google docs) require students to collaborate toward a common goal, and create student interaction.

●   **Student-led discussion:** Provide opportunities for students to lead discussion and respond to student comments.

●   **Q&A forum/discussion:** Provide opportunities for students to post and respond to general, ungraded, content-related or non-content-related questions on course functions, expectations, etc.

*Outside platforms: If resources outside the LMS are used, instructors should be mindful to ensure that all grades and other information subject to FERPA laws are conducted within a protected course frame.*

**Learning and Technology Support**

*The college will assure that distance learners have access to student support services that are comparable to those provided to on-campus learners.*

●   **Learning Resources** - Provide information on learning resources both onsite and online e.g. links to Moorpark College online library references,  and databases, the Writing Center,and other resources.

* **Moorpark College Student D2L support Ph. 805-553-4121**; email: [mcstudentD2Lsupport@vcccd.edu](mailto:mcstudentD2Lsupport@vcccd.edu)

Monday: 8:30am – 1:pm Tuesday: 8:30am – 12pm ; 3:00pm – 5:30p Wednesday: 8:30am – 2:30pm Thursday: 3:00pm – 5:30pm

* **Vcccd Help Desk** - Provide contact information for help with student sign-on issues.<http://www.vcccd.edu/departments/information-technology/distance-education>
* **Publisher resources -** link to publisher content, tutorials, self-assessment, etc. Note that not all publisher resources, including course packs, videos and other resources may not be accessible to students with disabilities.
* [Student services links](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Aji8d1kLqRhaSQn0AZrxsYDF1jlw8yoZc07kJ3rHXUE/edit) **-** Counseling, registration, course schedules and catalog, etc/ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Aji8d1kLqRhaSQn0AZrxsYDF1jlw8yoZc07kJ3rHXUE/edit>

**Legal Matters**

●   **Copyright** – Section 107 of [the Copyright Act](https://www.copyright.com/Services/copyrightoncampus/basics/fairuse_rules.html) commonly known as Fair Use, sets guidelines for the use of copyrighted materials included inside a password-protected LMS that are not used for profit. Four criteria are applied: The nature of the use, the nature of the work, the amount or level of substance of the work being used, and whether the use would result in loss of income to the copyright holder. In general, educational uses inside a password-protected course shell that are not used for profit, that are small portions and not whole works will be considered Fair Use. Videos and other copyrighted materials should not be shared outside the course.

●   **Legal shared materials**

For shared professional materials, or creative commons, [http://creativecommons.org/](%20http://creativecommons.org/%20)  when applicable.

**Accessibility and Universal Design**

* *State and federal law require that materials be accessible to all students at arrival in the course, with or without an ACCESS confidential memo. Instructors should be mindful of screen-reader software capabilities and limitations. Course content for the disabled provides the same educational experience*
  + *Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act (1973)*
  + *Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act (1973, amended 1998)*
  + *Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)*
  + *California Government Code section 11135 (mirrors federal anti-discrimination statutes)*
  + *Title 5 section 55200 (requires all online instruction to be compliant with ADA and Rehabilitation Act)*

*For details, consult the California Online Education Initiative* [*https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=jayme%20johnson%20accessibility*](https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=jayme%20johnson%20accessibility) *or*

*California Community Colleges Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines.*

[*http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/2011DistanceEducationAccessibilityGuidelines%20FINAL.pdf*](http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/2011DistanceEducationAccessibilityGuidelines%20FINAL.pdf)

●  **Accessible content for students with Disabilities** – In compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, the instructor must provide the identical educational experience for all students. Students must be able to access content through screen readers or other adaptive programs.

* Charts and graphs with numeric information are provided as readable files (not as image files.)
* Links within the course describe the website or name and location of the link, rather than using “click here.”
* Alternative text tags are provided for all photos and images, enabling instructors to embed a short description of the photo/image so a screen reader will provide this information to the student. The description of the image entered by the instructor will be read by the screen reader.
* Accessible documents employ formatting tools such as stylized headers, lists, ordering, and table tools, to make documents ready for electronic readers and other assistive devices in compliance with ADA requirements. (e.g. Instead of making text a larger size or a color to denote a title, use a style Heading 1 as Objectives, Heading 2 as Assignments, etc.) Accessible course files can also be created using the LMS-provided files that are pre-coded for maximum readability using html.
* Captioned videos **–** All videos must be captioned. Instructor-created videos may be submitted to [3CMedia Solutions](https://www.3cmediasolutions.org/) for free captioning.
* Scanned documents – Materials being scanned must be “Text Recognized” by OCR software. In Adobe Acrobat Pro, go to Tools > Text Recognition > In This File, to recognize the characters in the scanned image. Doing this takes the scanned image from being just an image PDF to being a searchable PDF. Searchable PDF allows for the text in the scanned image to be highlighted by the mouse cursor and read by assistive technologies.

Definition of Terms

[Distance Education is defined](http://www.accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Guide_to_Evaluating_DE_and_CE_2013.pdf) by ACCJC as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which supports, regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Synchronous is real-time instruction or meeting, in which both parties are present in the online class at the same time for the instructional delivery or meeting.

Asynchronous is a format of course delivery in which the instructor and students are not ‘attending’ the class simultaneously. Students individually access asynchronous class content at various non-appointed times throughout the course of the class.