Guide to Teaching Online at USC

Teaching online at USC is guided by the Core Principles of Quality Teaching, strategies from the Student Experience Project (SEP), and the Critical Teaching Behaviors framework. These elements work together to promote clarity, engagement, and continuous improvement. By following this guide, faculty can design and deliver courses that set clear expectations, foster belonging, and create meaningful learning experiences that support student success.

1. **Start with a solid design plan**

Use the High Impact Design for Online Courses (HIDOC) model to plan before you build. Identify your learners, write measurable learning outcomes and objectives, choose a clear course structure, map assessments and activities, select materials and tools, plan learner support, and set up a routine for improvement.

2. **Create your syllabus**

Draft a syllabus that outlines learning outcomes, grading policies, assessments, technology requirements, communication expectations, and academic integrity guidelines. This document establishes the foundation for the course and ensures consistency with university requirements.

3. **Develop your course map**

Create a course map that lists modules, outcomes, readings, media, activities, and assessments. Keep alignment visible so every activity directly supports a stated outcome.

4. **Build the "Start Here" module in Blackboard**

Create a clear starting point with a course schedule, a tour or screenshots, and a brief welcome video. Place it first in your course so students know where to begin.

5. **Set a consistent module structure**

Organize content into modules that repeat a simple pattern: overview, objectives, to-do list, materials, activities, assessments, and a brief wrap-up. Name modules consistently so navigation is predictable.

6. **Build with accessibility from the start**

Run Blackboard Ally, caption videos, add transcripts, and write alternative text for images. Use clear headings, check color contrast, and provide accessible file formats. These steps support learning and meet compliance requirements. For detailed guidance and resources, visit Digital Accessibility.

7. **Design assessments inside the modules**

Add assignments, tests, discussions, and journals in the module where students need them. Include clear instructions that state purpose, steps, grading criteria, and due dates. Build rubrics to streamline feedback.

8. **Plan for academic integrity**

If you give proctored tests, use Respondus LockDown Browser, Respondus Monitor, or ProctorU as needed. For other assessments, apply safeguards such as randomizing questions, setting time limits, and using SafeAssign for written work. Incorporate authentic assessments like projects, reflections, and case studies to promote meaningful learning. Provide clear statements in your course so students know what to expect.

9. Incorporate media effectively

For high-quality videos, schedule time in the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) course production studios to use resources such as lecture capture, the lightboard, teleprompter, or green screen. Even a short welcome or course tour video can strengthen your presence with students.

10. Preview the course as a student

Use Student Preview to check navigation, visibility, links, dates, and the Gradebook. Ask a colleague or an instructional designer to provide feedback prior to student access.

11. Run a self-review with the Quality Standards for Online Courses (QSOC)

Use the Quality Standards for Online Courses to check structure, clarity, interaction, assessment, resources, and accessibility. Address any gaps you find before the course opens.

12. Set your delivery routine for presence and communication

Post a welcome announcement, engage in discussions early, and maintain a steady rhythm of weekly updates. Share grading timelines and office hours, return feedback within 5-7 days, and provide class-wide takeaways.

13. Facilitate active learning

Use discussions for analysis and reflection, add low-stakes check-ins, and connect activities to real contexts. In live sessions, break up lectures with polls, breakout prompts, or collaborative notes. Incorporate case studies, group projects, peer feedback, or interactive tools to further strengthen engagement.

14. Monitor participation and reach out early

Monitor logins and activity in Blackboard. Nudge students who miss work with supportive messages and clear next steps. Early outreach prevents small issues from turning into barriers.

15. Gather midcourse feedback and adjust

Share a brief check-in or survey, clarify any confusing instructions, and adjust pacing as needed. Let students know about the changes so they recognize their feedback is valued.

16. Close the loop

End with a recap announcement or brief video. Highlight ways students can build on what was learned and note any final steps.

This guide provides the overall process for teaching online at USC, outlining the sequence from design through delivery. For detailed instructions, templates, and examples, consult the Online Course Design, Development, and Delivery resources on the CTE website. Use this guide to see the complete process and rely on the other sections when you need specific guidance at each stage.

When considering your next steps, think about whether you want to continue independently, seek support, or combine both approaches. Some faculty prefer to use the guide and resources on their own, while others benefit from consultations and feedback through CTE. Both approaches support continuous improvement and growth as an online instructor.

After reviewing this guide, consider how you want to continue developing as an online instructor:

- Schedule a consultation with a CTE instructional designer to review your course map, Blackboard setup, overall course design or teaching strategies and receive personalized feedback.

- Ask a colleague or a CTE designer to provide feedback on your course delivery using the Online Course Delivery Feedback Guide to strengthen presence, communication, and facilitation.

- Apply what you've learned by teaching your next course using the steps as a checklist. Reflect on what worked well and what you may want to refine.

- Get involved with professional memberships through CTE's recommended organizations to stay connected with the wider online teaching community and access additional opportunities for growth.

- Engage in CTE learning opportunities (e.g., professional development sessions or short courses) to connect with peers and share practices.

- Build your teaching portfolio by collecting examples of course maps, student feedback, and teaching materials that demonstrate your growth as an instructor.

- Stay current by following updates from CTE and the broader field of online learning to integrate new tools and approaches over time.

By combining the guidance in this document with the resources and support available through the CTE, you can design and deliver online courses that are clear, engaging, and effective for students.