Instructional Materials

Students need to have all of the resources necessary for success easily accessible within the online classroom. Online instruction is generally organized both by modules (or units) and by weeks within the module, although other terminology can be used for these divisions as well. For example, I taught in an online program that organized the course content into "milestones" instead of weeks and named students' work as "tasks" rather than assignments. The point is that you need an organizational structure of some kind, which is sometimes dictated by the Learning Management System, or LMS, that your institution has chosen such as Blackboard, Canvas, D2L, Brightspace, e-College, and so on, or by your department or institution itself.

When I plan for online instruction, I organize everything by week, then I group those weeks into modules, posting a folder for each one. After this, I make a sub-folder for each week that contains everything students will need to complete the given tasks successfully. For example, the Week 10 folder for the online version of *Design Thinking for Entrepreneurs* contains the Week 10 PowerPoint lecture, two PDF articles that students are required to read, written instructions for Assignment 5, Student Resource 10, and a link to the grading rubric found in the Assessment folder.

I also create a "resources" folder that contains a copy of all of the materials in the weekly folders and additional items such as a student writing guide, the course syllabus, copies of any PDF articles students might be asked to read during the course, grading rubrics, assignment instructions, and so on. These items are organized into sub-folders by type (assignments, assessments, supplementary reading, and so on). This seems redundant, but it's intentionally so. For example, I'll post a given rubric in the assessment area, in the weekly folder in which the assignment is introduced, and in the weekly folder in which the assignment is due, as well as in the resources folder. This way, students always have the needed item easily accessible no matter where they decide to look for it. I don't want to send my students on a scavenger hunt every time they want a resource, so I anticipate where they'll look for things and provide the resources in those locations.

Online lectures should contain more verbiage than the PowerPoints you normally use when lecturing on campus unless you provide recorded narration of your lecture just as you'd deliver it in a regular classroom. It's very important to think through what you want students to know and ensure that all of those ideas are presented on your slides. If you're using recorded narration, make sure it's clearly audible. If the sound quality is at all fuzzy or distorted, you might want to provide captioning or a written transcript of the sound track, too.

If your course includes instruction in processes or skills, it's wise to create video content demonstrating what you want students to learn or how you want them to do it. You might consider enlisting additional help when filming yourself doing these things, or you can sometimes find videos of these processes online, then share the clip or link with your students. Some institutions also partner with a tutorial provider such as *LinkedIn Learning* that offers supplementary instructional content on demand.

The same formatting rules apply to all presentations and written materials: they should be clean, simple, legible, and clear. Be sure to proofread your text carefully and make sure any animations or sound files work properly. Students might not notice your mistakes when they're listening to your lecture in person, but when they can view your lecture over and over again those errors really stand out. The more thought we put into our instructional materials, the better our students' experiences in our online classes will be.