

## Porous boundaries in online instruction

Creating porous boundaries in online instruction can help create multiple ways for students to engage with the class. When instructors teach face-to-face (FtF), they often mention current events, a story that drives home the message, or show something related that's not required but pertinent to the course.

Online instruction in Covid time was swift, leaving little time for adapting. All of those small pieces you would mention in person don't get added to the Learning Management System (LMS), making it more difficult for students to relate it to their own experience. Instructors were under pressure to switch classes quickly, leaving time for only essential content, assignments, and assessments. This can leave students behind unintentionally trying to relate the content to their lives.

Providing resources that aren't necessarily required but are for the student to browse to help them understand and associate the content to help scaffold their own learning can be helpful. No matter how you lay out your online content, providing some context to students with specific language that materials are for their own learning but will not be on the assessment can help alleviate some of the pressure to rote memorize all of the content. Or, any content in the LMS is up for use in the assessments or other deliverables for the course.

How can you do this? As you work through your FtF lectures and labs, where do you bring in those extras that aren't always on the slides or from the text? Where do you look for additional content? Including those as resources students can access can help them understand, especially if you used it to help your own understanding. Supplementing with short audio, external links, or extra content that's specifically labeled as 'supplemental' can help you and the students get the most out of the class, making it more approachable and less intimidating. Audio recordings can provide students opportunity to listen multiple times as they work through those materials or written announcements they can refer back to when figuring out what's mandatory and what's not. Providing specificity will help keep everyone organized, even highlighting the time stamps in a longer video that are the most pertinent to the course so students can move right to them.

As someone who has taught almost 100% online for years, students consistently comment positively on the 'extras' in the LMS site. I mention them often in weekly

announcements and provide tutorials with specific language, so students know which content is essential and which is just for them encouraging them to download or save it for the future after the course ends for their own learning. I never close off any of the content of the course or have it unavailable at any time. I make the language personal, "I've uploaded these things for you...." I never meet some of my students in person but work to replicate some of what an in-person class might look like.

Providing multiple ways to learn, differentiating between content and supplemental, and providing clear communication helps make online education more porous, leaving room for students to create their own understanding, and giving you the opportunity to share those extra resources to help more students understand and relate course content to their future jobs and careers.

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