Communication Tips for Distance Education

Overcommunicate but don't overwhelm students with text

In an online environment, students will need more explicit communication about the structure and goals of the class, their performance, and your expectations. But students can only process a little information at a time. Shorter messages are better than long messages. Also, consider varying the mode of communication by adding audio or video files.

Establish <u>regular</u> communication patterns, so students know how and when you will be communicating with them and what they can expect to hear.

One helpful practice is to post a daily announcement to the class that summarizes what students have learned from the previous day's lesson, describes what students will be learning in the current day's lesson, and explains to students how these lessons connect to major themes or questions in the course.

Also, consider reminding students in these communications about upcoming due dates.

Set expectations for availability and response times

Include language about setting expectations for response times and general availability times. Add language to your syllabus about when you will check into the course and how long students should expect to wait before receiving a response.

For example: "Outside of our scheduled synchronous meetings, the times for which will be posted via email, announcements, and in our syllabus, I generally check into the class, respond to posts, and grade submitted work weekday mornings between 9 and 11 am MT. I check the course again briefly around 4 pm most days. I will respond to emails and messages posted in the course within about 24 hours during the week and once over the weekend."

Use multiple modes of communication

- Use the announcement function
- Send emails
- Record audio/video messages
- Comment on discussion boards
- Include important information in feedback on individual assignments

Communicate critical information in different places

Do not worry about repeating the same information. Such repetition is a best practice in distance education, especially if you communicate the same information in different modes.

Let students know what kinds of information they can expect in different modes. A sample communication might look like this:

> Every day, in the announcements, I will include a short video summarizing what we have learned so far and offering a broad overview of the day's lesson, including an outline of the work you will need to complete for the day. Pay special attention to when the class will be meeting online through Zoom. Unless you are having problems with technology, your attendance will be factored into your participation grade. Emails are reserved for personal communications or timely updates throughout the day. I will be assigning you discussion topics and will also be communicating with you about your posts. I will be providing you with written feedback on your work. Virtual office hours will be held on Tuesday and Thursdays from 1:00 pm MST- 2:00 pm MST.

Hold students accountable

It will be easier for you to hold students accountable for your communications if you have articulated your plan to them and have asked them to be responsible for doing their part.

Have a plan for when technology fails students

It is likely that at some point during the block you will experience a technology glitch. Someone's wifi will go down or their computer will break or our technology will fail. If a student can no longer access their computer, how do you want them to contact you to let you know? What is your plan if technology fails during a synchronous communication? What is your plan if a student is unable to access readings or submit assignments?