

### The VOCAL Online Teacher

Savery (2005) proposed that teaching online requires a special set of teaching skills. The teacher should be visible, organized, compassionate, analytical, and a leader by example. This VOCAL approach summarizes key characteristics an instructor uses in an effective online learning environment. Savery stated,

The ability of the teacher to effectively infuse these characteristics into their instructional practice—to be VOCAL—will promote a supportive, challenging, constructive, rigorous and effective instructional environment. Instructors who practice a VOCAL approach will have more productive learning environments, fewer management problems and more positive learning experiences with their students (p. 1).

The VOCAL strategies associated with this VOCAL approach are applicable to varying degrees in web-enhanced, blended/hybrid, or entirely online learning environments. The focus of this writing is the online learning environment.

**Visible**—Instructor visibility is essential in an online environment. Students need to know that the instructor is “present” in the course. In turn, the instructor needs to know that the students are actively engaged in the course.

#### Strategies:

1. Place personal and professional information as well as a photo in the course syllabus or on the course welcome page.
2. Share instructor comments in a timely fashion to the discussion forums.
3. Send an email to students during the semester just to “check-in” with them.
4. Post announcements regularly. These announcements may be recognition of an outstanding accomplishment of a student or group in the course.

**Organized**—Organization of the instructor and the course are essential in creat-



### Online Faculty Mentors

Interesting in becoming a faculty mentor?

I am looking for faculty members interested in working directly with me in the design and development of online courses based on instructional design principles and best practices.

Following the development of your course, you will be requested to “mentor” another faculty member by providing access to your course as that instructor designs and develops an online course. —Julie McElhany

**C**—Many adults choose an online course to enable them to handle the schedule of conflicting life demands. Students in online courses must handle the idiosyncrasies of computers and network technologies. Learners in online courses tend to be more open to share their lives with an instructor in an online course. In consideration of these factors, Savery (2005) stated that the online instructor should exercise compassion.

#### Strategies:

1. Include a discussion category “All About Me” to provide opportunity for class members to grow together as a community and so that each person becomes a “real person” in the online course.
2. When a student shares information with you, the instructor, ask if you can share it with the rest of the online community.
3. Use familiar ice-breakers like a discussion topic that asks learners to post a message that includes something about themselves they are most proud of, or something no one knows about them.

**Analytical**—Successful learners are active participants in an online course. The online instructor should manage the course using available analytical tools to ensure that students are actively en-

**Organized**—Organization of the instructor and the course are essential in creating a meaningful learning environment. Learners want to know what is expected of them and when assignments and activities are due so they may organize their time. It is important that directions are clear, thorough, easy to find, and easy to navigate.

**Strategies:**

1. Prepare a syllabus that is thorough and answers learner questions before they are asked.
2. Provide course assignments and due dates early in the course so students know what to expect and when. Hyperlink to needed resource documents and other areas of the course.
3. Provide students with a document that explains the rules of netiquette in discussion forums and in communicating concerns to the instructor.
4. Anticipate the need for “non-instructional” discussions by creating a discussion forum titled “student lounge” or “coffee shop.”

course using available analytical tools to ensure that students are actively engaged.

**Strategies:**

1. Provide smaller and more frequent assessments across the course term.
2. Provide clear expectations and guidelines that will be used in assessing participation.
3. Specify the format for completed work to be used by students to assist you in the assessment process.

**Leader**—The instructor should lead in the online classroom by modeling best practices in teaching. The instructor sets the tone for the online course in communications with the student.

**Strategies:**

1. Follow through with promises. If you commit to doing something, do it.
2. Use the public and private means of online course communications to be visible to your students.

Savery J. (2005). Be VOCAL: Characteristics of successful online instructors. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 4(2), 141-152.

## Online Courses—Formative Survey

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are required to complete a formative survey approximately two weeks into the term. The purpose of the formative survey is for the instructor and department head to monitor successful start-up of the term. Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is

Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
Jan 31-May 9 (14 Weeks)	Feb 15 - Feb 22	February 25
Feb 4-May 9 (13 Weeks)	Feb 15 - Feb 22	February 25
Jan 31-Mar 14 (7 Weeks)	Feb 14 - Feb 18	February 22
Mar 24-May 9 (7 Weeks)	Mar 27 - Mar 31	April 1

### eCollege Tips

**Coordinate Dropboxes with the Gradebook**

When returning assignments via the dropbox, remember that a dropbox must be included in the gradebook in order to return the assignment to the student. If the item is not included in the gradebook, you will receive an error message when you try to return the basket.

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**Exam Statistics**

Your online course includes a powerful diagnostic tool called **Exam Statistics**. Accessed from the Exam Builder or from the Unit and Quick Grade views in the

### Instructional Resource Links

**Learn Out Loud.com** – A collection of free audio and video covering several topics such as art & entertainment, business, history, literature, politics, science, social studies, technology, and more: <http://www.learnoutloud.com/Free-Audio-Video#directory>

**Internet Archive** - A library of open educational resources and university lectures; contains hundreds of free courses, video lectures, cultural and academic films, and more: <http://www.archive.org/details/education>

**Authentic Assessment Toolbox** – A how-to text on creating authentic tasks, rubrics, and standards for measuring and

Accessed from the Exam Builder or from the Unit and Quick Grade views in the Gradebook, Exam Statistics provides both exam-level and question-level statistical analysis for the exam.

For more information on creating administrative tasks, rubrics, and standards for measuring and improving student learning: <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm>

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## eCollege Training Sessions

Training sessions on specific eCollege components and instructional software tools are available for the design and development of your online course.

To find out more about each session or to register for one or more sessions go to [www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde](http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde). Select the 'training' link under Instructional Design on the left navigation bar.

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