

Task Force Digitale Lehre

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Recommendations for Online Teaching

1 Preliminary Remarks	1
2 Requirements.....	2
3 Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Teaching	2
4 Communication and Goal Setting.....	2
5 Introduction to Teaching Online: What is different?.....	3
6 Inclusive Online Teaching - What can instructors do to prepare barrier-free courses?	4
7 Recommendations on Netiquette	4

1 Preliminary Remarks

When planning your teaching, please remember that the summer term does not take place under ideal conditions. Small surveys among students¹ of different departments in Greifswald and Dresden show that:

- Online teaching is just as new and unfamiliar to university students as it is to their lecturers
- Many students at have poor technical equipment (shared computers, no headsets/cameras) and poor/expensive internet connections (mobile phone instead of cable)
- Many students (as you probably are too) are very busy with childcare/nursing
- Many students have additional financial worries besides the burden of the general situation due to the loss of student jobs.

¹ Sources: A. Lasch, German studies/linguistics TU Dresden: <https://t.co/qDKjPDzrCv?amp=1>, C. Meißelbach & C. Bochmann, Pol.Wiss. TU Dresden: https://tu-dresden.de/gsw/phil/powi/polsys/ressourcen/dateien/forschung/umfrage-digitale-lehre/studierendenbefragung-digitale-lehre.pdf/at_download/file; K. Marx, Philology U. Greifswald: <https://twitter.com/KonstanzeMarx/status/1247410817399734273?s=20>

2 Requirements

In general, most computers and laptops today offer the basic equipment to produce short instructional videos, commented lectures and simple podcasts. A headset helps to improve the sound quality of your contributions (live and recorded) and to avoid feedback effects. For successful teaching, you need a stable internet connection and your HU account at hand.

3 Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Teaching

In digital teaching, **synchronous learning** means that students and teachers learn and teach simultaneously in a digital space. A seminar or lecture can be held in this way. In contrast, **asynchronous learning** is independent of time and place.

If possible, we recommend the use of asynchronous teaching methods or a mixture of both. Use the different approaches according to their strengths (synchronous for active exchange, asynchronous for pre/post-processing).

As much as possible, create learning situations in which students can work at their own pace. For example, instead of streaming your lecture via zoom, you can record it. In this way, you enable even students with a poor internet connection to participate.

4 Communication and Goal Setting

Compared to a non-digital learning environment, learners take on average about twice as long to complete work assignments at home. If possible, adjust your learning goals and work assignments accordingly. Short, clearly formulated tasks and realistic learning objectives motivate and reduce drop-out rates. Define, if possible, how much time students should spend on a lesson or an exercise. To involve your students actively, encourage the formation of learning groups, set group tasks, and use peer feedback.

If possible, choose one tool to communicate all instructions and work assignments (for the HU, Moodle offers this feature). Offer digital consultation hours so that your students can reach you.

It is advisable to create a time structure for the entire course to provide orientation for students. This can be done through defined milestones, submission deadlines for papers, peer feedback loops or scheduled short synchronous meetings, etc.

Set realistic expectations for yourself. Digital teaching is a difficult process that takes time to work. There is a high probability that technical problems will occur, which can be frustrating for all participants. Communicate difficulties and considerations transparently so that you and your students can come to a solution together.

5 Introduction to Teaching Online: What is different?

The most noticeable difference is the lack of personal contact and technical mediation (or barrier) between the participants. In addition, in this summer term, no one is ideally prepared for this situation and many will be more stressed than usual because of other obligations and valid concerns. Our recommendation is: Deal with this situation openly and transparently.

- Allow yourself and the participants time to get to know each other, e.g. by taking the time to complete the technical check-in (do the microphones, cameras, headsets work? Is everyone familiar with the Zoom instruments?) to do a short personal check-in.
- At the beginning of the term and throughout, offer participants the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances with you in private (email, telephone, video call), if they feel that their participation possibilities will be severely limited.
- Create clear channels of communication (by email, by telephone) and be careful with your own time (and that of your participants!): "online" does not mean "immediately and always available", this should be clear and binding for everyone.
- Make "synchronous" sessions varied (not 90 minutes of presentation + 30 minutes of discussion) and with a clear time schedule to strengthen the opportunities for participation and exchange and to keep the participants' attention (e.g. Input 1 (15 min.) - Questions (5 min.) - Group task (30 min.) - Results (X times 5 min.) - Reaction/Input2 -(15 min.)...)
- Create opportunities for participation: Get support in moderating synchronous sessions (e.g. keeping the list of speakers, documentation (summary) of discussions for non-participants); by setting up working groups (breakout rooms in Zoom, working groups/forums in Moodle, private exchange via Messenger services (preferably Signal or Telegram rather than WhatsApp)); by integrating accessible learning materials (e.g. create subtitles for videos or descriptions for images/graphics in presentations)

6 Inclusive Online Teaching - What can instructors do to prepare barrier-free courses?

In principle, online teaching offers the possibility of reducing many barriers for people with disabilities due to their multimedia nature. However, digital media are not automatically barrier-free, but must be actively designed in such a way (selection of formats/fonts, activation of voice output options, descriptions for images, integration of assistive technologies in websites).

The Federal Office of Accessibility provides a good introduction into barrier-free teaching by offering resources for creating barrier-free PDFs and videos: https://www.bundesfachstelle-barrierefreiheit.de/DE/Praxishilfen/Informationstechnik/informationstechnik_node.html

In the summer term 2020, the situation will be further aggravated by the fact that many students will not have access to hardware (computer pools of the HU) and free network access (EDUROAM) as a learning infrastructure and will have to share computers and network access (possibly only via mobile phone) with others at home. Therefore, the following principle applies to the design of courses: the lower the threshold and the more asynchronous, the more accessible.

7 Recommendations on Netiquette

The switch to online teaching is a challenge for all teachers and students. Mutual consideration and understanding are therefore particularly important.

All participants should be aware that the digital course follows the same principles as an in-person lecture. For example, participants in digital courses should use their given name. It is also helpful to define basic rules of communication and handling of shared contributions and materials right at the beginning and to repeat them regularly until they become routine (e.g. by check-ins with tech tests). In some cases, the software offers technical aids here (e.g. zoom allows digital "hand raising" if participants want to speak). Work together, let the students support you in moderating larger courses (e.g. by keeping a list of speakers in the chat, by actively addressing the next speaker...). The aim is to avoid misunderstandings through clear communication (also before the start of the courses) and to create a learning atmosphere that is productive for everyone.

The following basic rules can be helpful in establishing a netiquette:

1. **The same communication standards apply in the digital space as in the classroom:** Contributions should always be relevant and respectful. Evaluation should be handled with care; insults and the sharing of private or inappropriate content do not belong in online teaching. All participants should also pay attention to appropriate spelling and punctuation and use humour and irony carefully in written communication to avoid misunderstandings.
2. **Avoid "side conversations" e.g. in chats.** Keep to the point, keep your contributions and comments factual and related to the discussion. A supposedly personal side note in a private chat with one person can, in the zeal of digital collaboration, accidentally end up in the chat for everyone.
3. **Pay attention to copyright and privacy:** Do not share material from others without being asked, quote correctly online (e.g. in forums or written contributions). Do not distribute screenshots or images of other participants or instructors without permission.
4. **Be understanding:** For many instructors and students a digital semester is a challenge. Mistakes and misunderstandings can and will occur and the relative anonymity of digital education can mean that criticism is not always expressed professionally. Seek open discussion in cases of conflict (personally via email, chat or zoom) and be especially understanding in this unusual situation.

Further resources for establishing a netiquette can be found here:

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>

<https://achievevirtual.org/7-rules-for-online-etiquette/>