

Social Presence: How Should Instructors Communicate Online?

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The Challenges of Online Social Presence

- Asynchronous format lacks immediate “reality” of classroom setting
- Students have trouble connecting with instructor as a “real” person
- Individual communication demands a greater investment of instructor’s time
- Switching between individual and group feedback more difficult online than face-to-face
- Discussions among students can become overdetermined by professor engagement

The Goals of Instructor Feedback

- **Correction:** To guide students through process, not just grade work (Pyke & Sherlock 2010)
- **Motivation:** To drive work and conversation forward, build confidence
- **Connection:** Students are more satisfied *and* successful when they feel personally connected to the instructor (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008)

“Increased social presence gives students a stronger sense of community and is effective for improving student learning”

-Tichavsky et al., 2015

TWO APPROACHES TO ONLINE FEEDBACK

INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

Pros:

- Student feels connected to instructor and attended to
- Student receives detailed, personal guidance

Cons:

- Not all students will engage with highly detailed feedback
- Students may feel isolated from other students, view class as one-on-one with professor
- Students may be overwhelmed by amount of feedback
- Instructor may be overwhelmed by amount of written communication necessary
- Instructor may burn out from repeating feedback to multiple students

Recommended Uses:

- Private homework like journals, quizzes, and exams
- To correct problem patterns in individual students
- To provide extensive feedback on major assignments

Recommendations

- Previous literature recommends instructor appearing in conferences and videos (Tichavsky et al., 2015).
- Design assignments to incorporate self-reflection & peer feedback
- Achieve balance using different types of feedback for different types of assignments
- Provide individual feedback only on major assignments
- Use collective feedback for short homework to take the place of in-class conversation
- Include tech instructions to cut down on need for feedback about technology itself (Pyke & Sherlock, 2010)
- Use the Blackboard announcements tool to post and e-mail regular updates with collective feedback to make instructor presence felt at macro level

Further Reading

- Gallien, T., & Oomen-Early, J. (2008). Personalized versus collective instructor feedback in the online courseroom: Does type of feedback affect student satisfaction, academic performance and perceived connectedness with the instructor?. *International Journal on E-learning*, 7(3), 463-476.
- Pyke, J. G., & Sherlock, J. J. (2010). A closer look at instructor-student feedback online: A case study analysis of the types and frequency. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(1), 110-121.
- Tichavsky, L. P., Hunt, A. N., Driscoll, A., & Jicha, K. (2015). “It’s Just Nice Having a Real Teacher”: Student Perceptions of Online versus Face-to-Face Instruction. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(2), 2.

COLLECTIVE FEEDBACK

Pros:

- Students see their work in context of the class as a whole
- Students may use feedback as a starting point for self-reflection
- Instructors look beyond individual errors to see patterns in student responses

- Opportunity to improve instruction at broad-scale

Cons:

- Students may lack a sense of individual attention
- Students may feel lost in the shuffle
- Group feedback may not apply to all students equally

Recommended Uses:

- Discussion board or blog feedback
- To motivate class as a whole
- To correct errors multiple students commit
- To provide weekly updates about class progress



In ENGH 101 DE, I create social presence with weekly announcements and a WP course blog.