

An Introduction to Online Teaching

Learning Technologies Workshop



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I. OVERVIEW

Introduction

A decade ago, it was common to hear that “online learning is the future!” Indeed, it became the future and is now very much the present, but our idea of what online learning should be has changed dramatically over those ten years. Educators are now at a point where they have revised what effective online learning means, discarding the early passive, consumption-oriented model for one that is far more engaging and interactive.



This two-part workshop offers a hands-on introduction to online learning. Part I provides a general overview of online teaching, course design best practices, common myths and mistakes, and questions for any newcomer to consider. Attendees will leave Part I with an assignment which they will complete and review as a group in Part II. Part II will also provide an opportunity to discuss further questions, concerns, and ideas for online teaching.

Audience

Instructors with minimal knowledge of and/or prior experience with online teaching.

Goals

- Build a foundational knowledge of the functionality, possibilities, strengths, and limitations of online instruction.
- Recognize similarities and differences between online and face-to-face teaching.
- Understand the processes, roles, and responsibilities of designing and facilitating an online class.
- Know how to avoid common mistakes in online teaching.
- Learn about the characteristics and expectations of the typical online student.

Format

- Part I (90 min)
 - Presentation – “What is Online Teaching?” (45 min)
 - Q&A (15 min)
 - Begin assignment for Part II (40 min)
- Part II (90 min)
 - Share finished assignments from Part I (25 min)
 - Review, refine, and share assignments together (50 min)
 - Discuss goals and next steps for online teaching (15 min)

Learning Technologies

Brett Coup, Associate Dean

coupb@cod.edu

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (M-F) | BIC 3401

cod.edu/online | codonline@cod.edu

630-942-2490

II. ELEMENTS OF ONLINE LEARNING

I. Instruction

In online learning, you are a “guide on the side,” not a “sage on the stage.”



Online learning is a powerful, flexible medium that can offer transformative learning experiences to your students – but it is up to you as the instructor to make that happen.

Success in the face-to-face classroom is no guarantee for success in online teaching. The goal of the two formats is the same – to help students develop knowledge, skills, and understanding – but what works well in the classroom may be only minimally effective online, and vice-versa. Your first step to being a successful online instructor is to recognize that you will need to approach it as a unique experience.

Here are four tips to orient yourself toward effective online instruction:

1. Make online learning an active experience

A good online course is not simply a repository for articles, PowerPoint slides, and multiple-choice tests. While these components may occupy a small part of a successful online course, they are limited in their ability to engage students and develop critical thinking skills. It is up to you to take what are otherwise passive, consumption-model materials and replace them with active learning experiences.

2. Use a variety of resources and activities

Videos tend to be more engaging than PowerPoint slides, but relying on videos alone (or any single type of resource) doesn't guarantee effective instruction. In the world of online learning, the sky is the limit! Think about ways to incorporate simulations, interactive websites, online museum exhibitions, social media, and gamification.

3. Be a regular, visible presence in the course

You might put a great amount of time and effort into creating your online course's resources and activities, ensuring that they are both interactive and engaging, but you also need to log in regularly and provide individualized feedback, discussion comments, and summaries of each unit's "big ideas." Simply responding to student emails is not enough; you need to initiate regular contact to show that you are present and that you care about student learning. If you don't seem to care, why should they?

4. Aim for andragogy, not pedagogy

Pedagogy is a model of learning that is appropriate for younger students, who have limited life experiences and depend more on the instructor for guidance and instruction. Andragogy, on the other hand, is better suited to working with adult learners, and is guided by the following assumptions:

- Adults are internally motivated and self-directed
- Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences
- Adults are goal-oriented
- Adults place a high value on relevancy and practicality
- Adult learners like to be respected as equals (Knowles 1984:12).

As you build your online course, try to incorporate activities and learning resources that are andragogical in nature. The table below (Jarvis 1985: 51) explains how andragogy differs from pedagogy.

| | Pedagogy | Andragogy |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The learner | Dependent. Teacher directs what, when, how a subject is learned and tests that it has been learned | Moves towards independence; self-directing. Teacher encourages and nurtures this movement |
| The learner's experience | Still developing; hence, teaching methods are didactic | A rich resource for learning. Hence teaching methods include discussion, problem-solving etc. |
| Readiness to learn | People learn what society expects them to. So that the curriculum is standardized. | People learn what they need to know, so that learning programs organized around life application. |
| Orientation to learning | Acquisition of subject matter. Curriculum organized by subjects. | Learning experiences should be based around experiences, since people are performance centered in their learning. |

B. Course Design

A clear, navigable, and media-rich learning experience allows students to explore content in a variety of ways.



Strong course design is arguably the most important way to ensure a successful online experience for your students. Course design refers to such things as content organization, user-friendly navigation, visual consistency, clear directions, and ADA-compliant accessibility.

Solid planning is the best way to ensure that your course will be a successful experience for students, providing them engaging, rigorous opportunities to learn and demonstrate growth. The way your course is laid out should be so intuitive and smooth as to almost be unnoticeable. Confusing navigation, muddy information, and inconsistent layouts will frustrate students, detract from learning, and cause countless emails to flood your inbox with questions about what to do next. These frustrations can be minimized by employing some simple course design strategies.

Below are just a few common course design problems, and some easy ways to solve them.

| Problem | Solution |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Endless blobs of content | Break large pieces of content into shorter, bite-sized “chunks.” This makes it easier for you to organize your course, and easier for students to review and remember what they are learning about. Also, add images and charts to brighten and elucidate content. |
| Unintuitive or inconsistent navigation | Visually map out your course ahead of time, and see how you can consolidate its components into groups that make sense. A good rule of thumb for navigating is “two clicks is good; one click is best.” |
| Confusing or incomplete directions | Online courses lack the luxury of having you personally explain what you want students to do with their assignments. Make sure that all of your directions explain things as clearly as possible. (Having someone proofread your directions can be a big help with this.) |
| Low ADA accessibility | Tiny text and unusual color combinations may not bother you, but it might be a real problem for someone with vision problems. Consider high-contrast text and captioned images/videos to accommodate a wider audience. |
| Broken links and old articles | Before a course goes live, check all links to make sure that they’re functioning properly. Old articles can be useful, to be sure, but try to find more current versions if they exist. |

C. Student Engagement

Engaging students might be difficult at times, but it can mean the difference between deep learning and rote memorization.



Online students tend to prefer the freedom, flexibility, and self-directedness that is inherent to online learning. That should not suggest, however, that they are not also eager for a highly engaging, connected, and guided experience that both ignites their passion for learning and recognizes them as individuals.

Because of the nature of online learning, engagement may seem like a more difficult hurdle than in face-to-face teaching, but in fact the opposite may well be true. Online courses offer a variety of different ways to work with your students, and enable you to draw on an array of tools and resources to do so.

As the instructor, you have a great deal of control over how students interact with course content, with each other, and with you. It is important that you provide a strong, clear structure in your overall course design, and populate it with resources and activities that pull them into wanting to explore the content. Just as important, however, is your presence in the course itself.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Content Delivery

- **Video Lectures**

PowerPoints can be useful in a face-to-face course, but when they're just thrown online, they tend to fall flat because you are not there to present them! Static slides will likely have minimal impact on knowledge retention and skill development. Consider creating a series of short (5-7 minute) video lectures instead.

- **Interactive Websites**

Not all content has to be delivered straight through you and your course – remember, the entire internet is right at your fingertips! Find some sites that provide an interactive, media-rich experience for exploring content. Here are a few examples:

- Kowloon Walled City - projects.wsj.com/kwc/
- Visualizing the U.S. Electrical Grid - n.pr/1BSyd78
- Historic Threads: Three Centuries of Clothing - bit.ly/1H2Ofwm
- Hubble Space Telescope - hubblesite.org/
- CyArk UN Cultural Heritage Sites - www.cyark.org/
- British Library Sounds Archives - sounds.bl.uk/

- **Variety**

No matter how you deliver content, make sure that you use a variety of resources to do so. Relying solely on one medium will bore your students, and possibly cause you to overlook what works best for a given topic.

Group Activities

- **Discussion Forums**

Discussion forums allow students to address a topic/issue/question together asynchronously (i.e., at different times) by writing individual responses and “posting” them for everyone to read and respond to.

The typical model for online discussions involves students answering one or two questions posed by the instructor, and later responding to each other. This model, if overused, can have limited learning potential. Instead, consider splitting students into groups to create a piece of work that they then share with other groups, and offer suggestions for improvement.

- **Wikis**

Wikis give students (often divided into small groups) a blank webpage to collaboratively assemble information on a given topic. They can create, edit, or delete anything on it asynchronously, and their groupmates can do the same. What results is a single, collective piece of work that showcases the best thinking of all contributors.

Communication

- **Email**

When students have a problem, big or small, they will email you. It is important that you don't leave them waiting too long for a response; try to respond within 24 hours.

NOTE: Make it clear to your students early in the course what they can expect for turnaround time on email responses.



- **Participate in Discussion Forums**

By contributing to discussion forums, you are demonstrating to students that you are a partner in their learning, and are actively reading what they have written.

- **Provide Individualized Feedback**

One of the biggest complaints online students have is a lack of instructor feedback. Don't just give student work a grade – tell them why they earned it, what they did well, and how they can improve it.

- **Announcements**

Is there an important deadline coming up, or a due date change? You can send out an announcement to students that will be automatically be sent to their COD email accounts.

- **Virtual Office Hours**

Offering students a couple of opportunities each week to speak with you virtually (via chat or other synchronous tool) can be a valuable resource for them – and for you!

D. Assessment

Assessment is more than quizzes and tests; it is an ongoing process by which students show increasing mastery of the knowledge, skills, and understandings that they are building in your course.



Like in any face-to-face course, online students need to demonstrate their learning beyond rote memorization. As a recognized authority in your discipline, students will look to you to provide meaningful opportunities and feedback on their growth. Online learning offers a multitude of tools to make this a successful experience, but it is up to you to take advantage of them. While it might be tempting to rely on the relative ease and clarity of what is familiar, you can transform assessment into a powerful experience by taking advantage of the many online tools available to you.

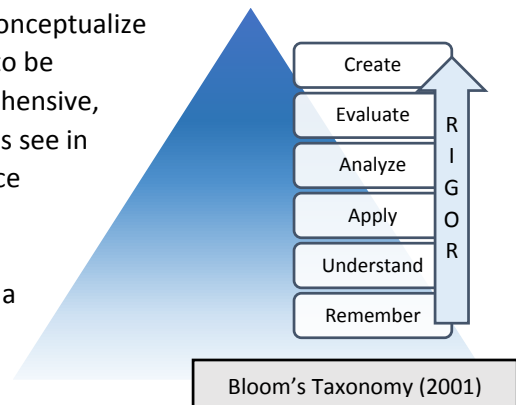
Below are some suggestions to keep in mind as you get started with creating your online assessments.

- **Objectives**

Your course and unit objectives should be clear to students, because they communicate the purpose, direction, and goals of what you are asking students to do. Burying your objectives somewhere in the syllabus and never mentioning them again kills their tremendous potential. Every time students begin exploring a new topic or assignment, the applicable learning objective(s) should be restated.

- **Bloom's Taxonomy**

Bloom's Taxonomy (2001) provides a useful way to conceptualize different levels of critical thinking. Each level needs to be addressed throughout a course to ensure for comprehensive, deep learning, which won't happen if all that students see in your online course are article links and multiple-choice quizzes. Instead, think of how you can challenge and engage in more meaningful ways. This doesn't necessitate using fancy technology tools – it's simply a matter of using the tools you choose more purposefully .



- **Quizzes/Tests**

Often, quizzes are the “go-to” form of assessment for online instructors because they’re straightforward, familiar, and easy to score. To be sure, they can be effective tools, but consider using them primarily as ungraded practice activities or pre-assessments.

- **Case Studies / Authentic Assessment**

Giving students a real-world problem to solve can be a deeply meaningful (and fun!) way for them to demonstrate their ability to think critically and build important skills. These can be done alone or in groups.

- **Rubrics**

Rubrics are charts that break down how students are scored on a given assignment against a range of performance criteria, and corresponding levels of achievement for each. Rubrics help students understand what is expected of them and why they received the grade they did, (thereby removing any suspicion of arbitrary scoring), and can be applied to pretty much any assessment. Online learning makes it easy to incorporate rubrics with a variety of assignments.

Here is an example rubric for a writing assignment:

| | High Proficiency | Proficiency | Some Proficiency | Limited/No Proficiency |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thesis a) Originality | Develops fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking. | Thesis is somewhat original. | Thesis may be obvious or unimaginative. | Thesis is missing. |
| Thesis b) Clarity | Thesis and purpose are clear to the reader; closely matches the writing task. | Thesis and purpose are fairly clear and match the writing task. | Thesis and purpose are somewhat vague OR only loosely related to the writing task. | Reader cannot determine thesis and purpose OR thesis has no relation to the writing task. |
| Organization | Fully and imaginatively supports thesis and purpose. Sequence of ideas is effective. Transitions are effective. | Organization supports thesis and purpose. Transitions are mostly appropriate. Sequence of ideas could be improved. | Some signs of logical organization. May have abrupt or illogical shifts and ineffective flow of ideas. | Unclear organization OR organization plan is inappropriate to thesis. No transitions. |
| Support/ Reasoning | Substantial, logical, and concrete development of ideas. Assumptions are made explicit. Details are germane, original, and convincingly interpreted. | Offers solid but less original reasoning. Assumptions are not always recognized or made explicit. Contains some appropriate details or examples. | Offers somewhat obvious support that may be too broad. Details are too general, not interpreted, irrelevant to thesis, or inappropriately repetitive. | Offers simplistic, undeveloped, or cryptic support for ideas. Inappropriate or off-topic generalizations, faulty assumptions, or errors of fact. |
| Use of Sources | Uses sources to support, extend, and inform, but not substitute writer's own development of ideas. Combines material from a variety of sources, including personal observations, scientific data, and/or authoritative testimony. Doesn't overuse quotes. | Uses sources to support, extend, and inform, but not substitute writer's own development of ideas. Doesn't overuse quotes, but may not always conform to required style manual. | Uses relevant sources but lacks in variety of sources and/or the skillful combination of sources. Quotations and paraphrases may be too long and/or inconsistently referenced. | Neglects important sources. Overuse of quotations or paraphrase to substitute writer's own ideas. Possibly uses source material without acknowledgement. |

- **Vary the Stakes**

Although some college courses may traditionally rely on just one or two major assessments (such as term papers) for the entire semester, numerous studies reject this as the best way to assess student learning. To be sure, summative assessments, such as portfolios, papers, and other projects are great to include, but they should be interspersed with many more formative, low-stakes assessments, such as short Q&As or mini-quizzes. Low-stakes assessments give students more opportunities to check their own growth and mastery, thereby helping you and your students identify areas they need to address more intensively.

III. ONLINE STUDENT PROFILE

Today's online students, like any group of students, represent a wide variety of backgrounds. However, there are some common characteristics that tend to be true for many of them. Becoming familiar with what those are can help us frame our approach to online teaching more effectively.

Who is the Average Online Student?

The average online student will look slightly different depending on the institution, but the following tend to be true for most.

- Is slightly older than the typical college-age student
- Has work and family commitments
- Prefers online courses for cost and schedule flexibility

Characteristics of Successful Online Students

In many cases, the qualities that help online students to succeed are the same ones that would benefit any student. However, those listed below are of particular importance for the online learner.

- Able to manage time well
- Organized and self-disciplined
- Intrinsically motivated to succeed
- Communicates well in writing
- Has a regular study space and access to a computer
- Is comfortable using technology

Expectations & Preferences of Online Students

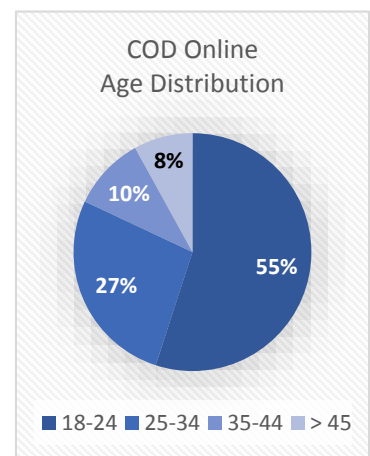
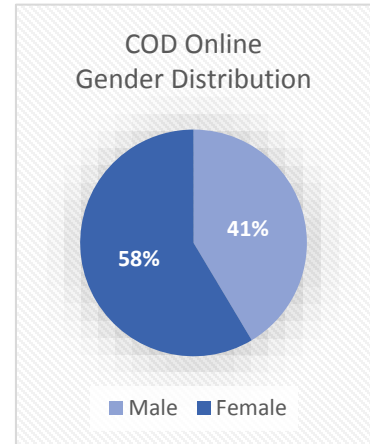
Online students tend to look for:

- Regular communication from/with instructor
- Equal balance of instructor-led, independent, and tutorial activities
- Courses that incorporate active, rather than passive, learning
- Shorter courses (6-8 or 9-12 weeks)

Biggest Complaints of Online Students

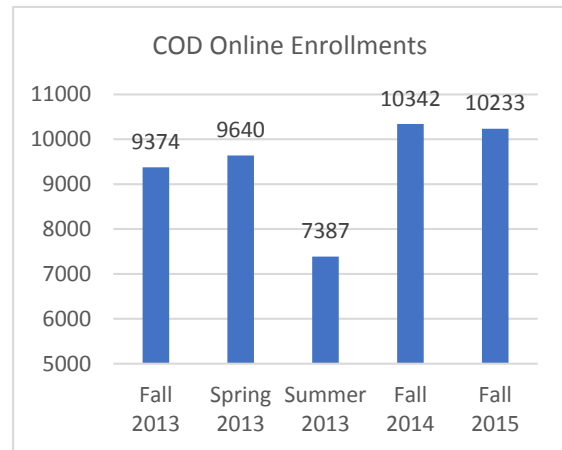
Despite independent learning being an attractive feature for most online students, they nevertheless are eager to have a significant amount of interaction with the instructor throughout a course. Lack of direct interaction may explain the higher attrition rate for online courses.

- Lack of instructor-initiated contact
- Lack of meaningful feedback
- Long wait for instructor responses
- Lack of clear directions
- Course content being limited to PowerPoints and articles
- Confusing course design



Illinois Online Courses and Enrollments

- Illinois colleges and universities reported 323,396 distance education enrollments during the Fall 2014 term. This is a 29% increase from Fall 2013.
 - The 40,891 enrollments for Fall 2014 account for 12.41% of all distance education enrollments.
 - Community colleges account for 27.4% of all online course enrollments.
- College of DuPage online enrollments for spring 2015 was 10,233. The next largest enrollment was Parkland College at 4,330.



IV. SEVEN MYTHS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING

Just like the teaching profession in general, the realm of online learning is sometimes the unfortunate recipient of unjustified or misguided assumptions. Below are seven myths you may have come across.



1. The more information I provide, the clearer the activity/resource will be.

Clarity in an online course is optimized when you reach that “Goldilocks” zone between not enough information and too much. While you don’t want to leave students confused with a lack of direction, you also don’t want to drown them in a sea of text.

2. The more content I provide, the more my students will learn.

Meaningful learning is not determined by amount of information. Although there might be 12 good articles on the topic you’re covering, is it necessary to read all of them to meet the unit objectives? Might students’ time and effort be more effectively balanced between reading a few articles, analyzing them, and discussing their ideas with the other students?

3. All discussion forums (or wikis or tests, etc.) have the same learning potential.

Just like the adage, “It’s the singer, not the song,” the learning potential of an online activity depends more on how you set it up than on the fact that it simply exists, regardless of what it is. A discussion forum used in engaging, innovative ways will trump a poorly designed social media assignment every time.

4. Students don’t want to see videos of me.

Yes, they do! Watching some video lectures of you talking about a given topic is certainly preferable to reading static text and PowerPoint slides. (And feel free to add a little humor!)

5. Students are all tech whizzes / they know more about technology than me.

Yes, they may be masters of Facebook and Twitter, but when it comes to basic computer skills and online learning, you might be surprised. In many cases, attaching documents and performing simple tasks in MS Word is unfamiliar territory for them.

6. If the course is pretty, then it is user-friendly.

Just like cars, computers, and appliances, a pretty online course has no guarantee of being user-friendly. Can students navigate their way through and between units, resources, and activities quickly? Are directions and information easy to understand? Are there clear headings and sub-headings for sections?

7. Successful face-to-face activities will be successful online activities.

As noted in the Online Student Profile, although many of the qualities and habits that help a student succeed in face-to-face learning will also help online, some will not. For example, a student who thrives on in-person discussion and hands-on experiences may flounder online.

V. MOVING FORWARD

So you're ready to step into the exciting world of online teaching – welcome! The first thing to remember is that you are not alone. COD's Learning Technologies is here to help you make your online course a successful experience for both you and your students.

Step 1: Get Your Feet Wet

If you're completely new to online learning, there are a number of ways you can learn more about it. Here are just a few:



- Ask another faculty member who has experience teaching online to show you some of his/her courses.
- Register for a free online course through Coursera ([coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org)) or edX ([edx.org](https://www.edx.org)). Both offer hundreds of courses through major universities, and tend to be only 3 to 8 weeks long.
- Read some e-learning blogs, such as Connie Malamed's thelearningcoach.com or Jason Rhode's jasonrhode.com.
- Create a free Blackboard course through CourseSites ([coursesites.com](https://www.coursesites.com)) and play around with its features.
- Stop by COD's Learning Technologies (BIC 3401) and ask the friendly folks there to give you a one-on-one overview of online learning.
- **Sign up for the Online Faculty Certification Course** (see below).

Step 2: Wade into the Pool

Online instruction is an ongoing, active collaboration in which you are course designer, builder, and instructor, not just a passive partner relegated to the sidelines. Therefore, it is essential that you familiarize yourself with not just using Blackboard, but designing, creating, and editing content within it. With that in mind, you will want to complete the **Online Faculty Certification Course** as early as possible, which is offered through Learning Technologies. This five-week, fully online course will give you a functional understanding of how Blackboard works, and an opportunity to practice using many of its tools.



Step 3: Dive In!

Speak to your Coordinator or Associate Dean about which online course you'd like to teach and how soon you'd like to teach it. If a master course file has already been created by another instructor, then you will get a copy of it and begin planning out how you will be using it. If no master course file exists, then you will be working with an online course development team to brainstorm, plan, and build it. This process will take approximately a full semester to complete.



As you build or modify your online course, keep these tips in mind:

- 1) Your course should be an active, engaging experience for students. Think carefully about how you will achieve that.
- 2) Have an adventurous attitude toward online learning, and be willing to learn new tools and try new things.

- 3) Know that you're not alone – Learning Technologies is always here to help you! Colleagues and online communities are also great for building a network of ideas and support.
- 4) Don't feel like you have reinvent the wheel. The internet is full of excellent resources, many of which are freely reusable (i.e., "open").
- 5) Organization and navigation should not be obstacles for your students; they should be seamless and intuitive (i.e., where you would expect things to be).
- 6) Make your course your own! Don't feel beholden to what others have done.

VI. HELPFUL RESOURCES

Websites

COD Online

cod.edu/online

COD Library e-Resources

codlrc.org/faculty/online

OER Commons

www.oercommons.org

MERLOT

www.merlot.org

Online Learning Consortium

www.onlinelearningconsortium.org

EDUCAUSE

www.educause.edu

eLearning Industry

www.elearningindustry.com



Articles

Introduction to Online Teaching and Learning

www.wlac.edu/online/documents/otl.pdf

The Ultimate eLearning Course Design Checklist

elearningindustry.com/the-ultimate-elearning-course-design-checklist

Bloom's Digital Taxonomy

edorigami.wikispaces.com/Bloom%27s+Digital+Taxonomy

4 Tips for Content Chunking in e-Learning

elearningindustry.com/4-tips-for-content-chunking-in-e-learning

5 Tips to Spark Lively Online Discussions

elearninginfographics.com/5-tips-spark-lively-online-discussions-infographic/

Online College Students 2012: Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences

www.learninghouse.com/files/documents/resources/Online%20College%20Students%202012.pdf

Learning Online is Not a Spectator Sport: How to Make it Active

onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2012/09/22/learning-online-is-not-a-spectator-sport-how-to-make-it-active/

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