The following tips you can incorporate into your class are taken from the sessions offered in the 2022 Teaching and Learning Conference. References and citations for any data or statistics listed here can be found in the videos posted on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/c/ndsult.

### Videos in Classes
1. The four types of videos you can use in your course are: microvideos, tutorials, lectures, and screencasts.
2. Adding video to a course increases engagement and is 83% more effective for retaining information.
3. Pre-recorded videos allows students to rewatch or prewatch videos to learn in their own way and time.
4. Offering videos reduces cognitive overload for your students.

### Mental Models or Systems Models
5. Mental models or systems models are the top student-ranked most helpful technique or strategy, even when the instructor isn’t using it in their class.
6. Mental models help you evaluate the starting points of your students. If students can work backwards, forwards, and in all directions within a concept, then they have deep understanding.
7. Mental models work best over time and in groups. It is cognitively demanding to work alone.

### Alternative Grading
8. Equitable grading strategies include: optional retakes, which can be split out by topic; flexible deadlines; limited grading of behaviors; equitable grading scales; and ungraded formative assessments.
9. Use homework and class time as opportunities for learning and feedback. Learning happens through mistakes.

### Adult Learners
11. In adult learning the instructor is the facilitator who helps students navigate their learning.
12. You can promote independent learning in your class by slowly removing any supports throughout the semester.
13. Connect adult student’s learning with life experiences.
14. Adult learners tend to learn more from their peers.
15. Practice the See, Do & Teach method with adult learners because they learn better when they have to teach someone else a concept.

### Language Diversity
16. Recognize there is language diversity in every class; it may be through different languages, different regional or cultural dialects, or even familial usage of the language.
17. If personal interactions are pleasant, people are more willing to take on the cognitive load of listening to an individual with an accent. Facilitate pleasant interactions with your students.
18. Students have a higher cognitive load when they are worried about grammar. Consider not grading based on language and grammar usage when the concepts are the most important thing to learn (ex. discussion boards).
19. Grammar is the first thing to breakdown when learning new concepts.
20. Be specific about grammar expectations in your assignment rubrics.

### Helping Students Write Better
21. Provide students with many examples of good writing in your field.
22. Instruct students on the writing process, which is: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, and publishing. Many students do not know the process.
23. Hold group discussions to give good quality feedback and to discuss their struggles.
24. Peer editing helps students analyze both good work and their own work.

### Student Wellness
25. On your syllabus include on-campus resources for wellness and a statement of wellness. Assign wellness-related tasks like writing a paper on their wellness plan or touring a wellness resource.
26. In class, use clickers to allow students to anonymously gauge how they are feeling today.
27. Be a wellness role model for your students.
28. Offer flexible homework submissions (ex. videos, creative writing, etc.), adjust your deadlines to promote better sleep for your students, and consider offering extra credit or make-up points for participating in wellness activities.
Racial Achievement Gap
29. If you can adjust a student’s mindset you can help them have better outcomes.
30. Racial achievement gap was two times higher in classes with instructors who have fixed mindsets.
31. Instructors with a growth mindset tend to include why a student is learning a concept in their class.
32. Cognitive resources are split when a student is actively trying to avoid being stereotyped, which lowers their performance.
33. Active learning strategies have a disparate positive result for students of color.

Learning By Doing
34. Students need to see that you aren’t perfect, and you deal with the same issues they do.
35. Give students many examples of why they need the skills you are teaching them.
36. Bring in concepts that fit with the data they are working with.
37. Teach your students to self teach. Google is your best friend.

High & Low Technology for Rapid Feedback
38. Some high-tech tools that are fast and provide quick formative assessments include: clickers, Google products, diagrams.net, free polling software, Zoom chat, and Zoom polls.
39. A useful, low-tech tool for formative assessment is a color-coded card that corresponds to the answer choices. Students then raise their cards with their answer.
40. Don’t be afraid to improvise in your class.
41. Share the polls with your students and why you are doing them.
42. Let your students know it is okay to say, “I don’t know.”

Supporting Students in a Pandemic of Grief
43. Allow students space to share their story or speak about grief in class. Consider using a Blob Tree image to facilitate discussion.
44. Behaviors students might exhibit in class might reflect the stages of grief; be aware of the stages of grief.
45. Sometimes what we see as disengagement from our students is actually a grief response.
46. When a student is going through something big, they may tend to be more forgetful, have difficulty concentrating, and difficulty making decisions because our brains can only process so much.
47. Validate your student’s losses.

Flipgrid
48. Flipgrid is a free educational platform.
49. You can use Flipgrid to: encourage effective learning strategies, provide personal and direct feedback, and foster a sense of community.
50. Ask your students to connect a concept to something in their life, have them post a video discussing it.

51. Use video to provide feedback to students so they can hear your voice, inflection, tone, and see your non-verbal cues. It is less formal and faster than written feedback.

Trauma Informed Practices (TIP)
52. If stress is detected in your learning environment, learning will be more difficult for those impacted by trauma. If you, as the instructor, project stress your students can pick that up.
53. Individuals who have endured trauma have a harder time switching out of fight or flight mode and back into a more productive way of thinking.
54. Some of these everyday learning experiences can activate a trauma response: lack of choice, team building, unclear rules, ambiguity, and forced sharing.
55. Conduct a trauma walk through on your classes.
56. Assess your teaching through these six key principles: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and recognizing cultural, historical, and institutional power.
57. You might see the following responses in a student impacted by trauma who is currently in a fight or flight mode: difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, or recalling information; absenteeism; fear of risks; trouble with emotional regulation; anxiety about deadlines or coursework; self-blame or isolation; unhealthy relationships; or nothing at all. Trauma informed practices is based in equity, meaning you customize the tools for the individual’s strengths. Don’t assume that a person has had a trauma, but know it is a possibility.

Teach With Empathy (Not sympathy)
Sympathy is not empathy. Empathy is a feeling of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortune. Empathy is a way of connecting with people that shows you understand they are experiencing something meaningful—even though you may not understand exactly how it feels for them. Instructors high in teacher empathy do not lower standards; they identify and remove obstacles to learning.

Get To Know Your Students
In order to make an impact on students’ lives you need to understand them first. You can do this by deploying a student survey. You can ask students to write a “This I believe…” essay. You could also ask students to create their reflectivity statement.

Adopt A Growth Mindset
Help students adopt a growth mindset. This is the belief that I will need to persevere through difficulty before I succeed. The desire to work hard consistently with the courage to ask questions when confused.

Inclusive Course Policies
Design course policies that reflect a deep understanding of students’ personal and social situations – Incorporate course policies for greater inclusion and equity. Inclusive and equitable teaching provides opportunities for success for students from ALL identities.

Build Trust With Your Students
Trust your students, assume they are trying their best. Recognize each student has different pressures on their time and energy. Help your students understand the learning goals. Tell them the ‘why’ behind each assessment.

Collaborate With Students
Let students lead the learning process by collaborating with students to discuss progress on meeting their learning goals. Invite students to set personal learning goals within the domains of the course. Enable students to complete self evaluations and reflections across the semester. You might also reconsider strict deadlines.

The following tips, you can incorporate into your class, are taken from the sessions offered in the 2021 Teaching and Learning Conference. References and citations for any data or statistics listed here can be found in the videos posted on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/c/ndsuotl.

Teaching & Learning Conference Tips
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www.ndsu.edu/otl

Ease Asynchronous Learning
For asynchronous learning, make it easy for students to manage their learning. An organized course is the key to student success. An unorganized course will cause delay in assignments being completed. Make Blackboard navigation easier. Allow for students to have easy, accessible, and organized materials on Blackboard.

Be Flexible With Your Students
Flexibility improves the learning experience of your students. Post notes, assignments, class materials at least 5-7 days before deadlines. Provide structure by having assignment deadlines but have a flexible deadline policy. Allowing students to resubmit assignments or retake tests increases their motivation to learn.

Create An Engaging Learning Environment
Using a variety of ways to display and provide information is optimal for desired learning outcomes. Offering opportunities for choice and autonomy is one way you can create a more meaningful and engaging learning environment. Often students do not understand or appreciate the reason why what they are learning is important. Establishing the ‘why’ behind what you teach will help your students see relevance and value in the material.

Use Creative Ways To Engage Students
Instructors can use creative ways to engage students. For example, Dr. Sylvio May presents finger puppets alongside his presentations about the specific scientist being discussed. Dr. Beena Ajmera created themed weeks for students to create backgrounds on Zoom to fit into the themes. Dr. Jenny Linker shared how she used Swivel software in the classes she holds in the gymnasium. The camera follows the professor and can be integrated into Zoom.

For more information or assistance, contact:
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www.ndsu.edu/otl

2021 EDITION!
Week 1
Ensure your class registration is final, inquire about wait lists if needed, and introduce yourself to your academic advisor.

Week 2
Identify the office hours on your syllabi for each class and keep the list handy for when you need them!

Week 3
Find a good study space on campus that works for you. Spaces include your residence hall/apartment, the library, and outside some classrooms. There are a lot of great spaces around campus!

Week 4
Check on your current grade and attendance for each class. If you missed assignments or quizzes can you make them up? What else can you do to get back on track?

Week 5
Have you sent or received any emails from your advisor yet? If not, now is a great time to have an initial meeting with your academic advisor.

Week 6
Learn about academic organizations to get involved with your major. (Highlight a few that are relevant to your department or program.)

Week 7
Browse your major department’s webpage – view faculty bios and learn about their research interests. Can you get involved with their research or other opportunities? (Share a few minutes about something you are working on and how undergrads have been or could get involved.)

Week 8
Midterm of the semester – check in with faculty members again and prepare for midterms. Look ahead for any big final projects.

Week 9
Take a look at your Degree Map and familiarize yourself with the academic requirements for your major. You can plan a tentative list of classes to discuss with your advisor.

Week 10
Think about Spring registration and meet with your academic advisor.

Week 11
Take note of your current grade in the class and remaining work. Do you need to consider a withdraw from the course? Discuss options with your instructor and advisor. (Put a note on the syllabus/weekly tip that you are willing and open to chat. Students may need the reminder it’s okay to visit.)

Week 12
Check your Campus Connection account for any holds that may prevent timely registration for next semester.

Week 13
Register for classes as close to your assigned registration time for best availability of classes and class times.

Week 14
Put together a study plan for final exams.

Week 15
Make use of any study sessions offered. (List study sessions for your class.)

Week 16
Reflect on how the semester went and what adjustments you might want to make.

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701-231-7015 | ndsu.otl@ndsu.edu
www.ndsu.edu/otl/faculty_resources/getting_started

Include Alt Text With All Visuals
Why: Screen reader users, alternative text helps to communicate what is important in images and other visuals. All text helps people who can’t see the screen to understand what’s important in images and other visuals.

- How: Control + Click the image or object > Edit alt text > Type 1-2 sentences in the text box to describe the object and its context.

Do Not Use Infographics in Place of Text
Why: People who use screen readers sometimes scan a list of links. Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. For example, instead of linking to the text, click here, include the full title of the destination page.

- How: Click on the insert link option on the bottom toolbar > Insert Link > Write the information about the destination in the description > Write the URL in the web address box.

Don’t Use Color To Convey Information
Why: People who are blind, have low vision, or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors.

- How: Add an underline to color-coded hyperlink text so people who are colorblind know the text is linked even if they can’t see the color. For headings, consider adding bold or using a larger font.

Use Good Contrast
Why: People who are blind, have low vision, or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors.

- How: Add an underline to color-coded hyperlink text so people who are colorblind know the text is linked even if they can’t see the color. For headings, consider adding bold or using a larger font.

Use A Larger Font Size
Why: People who have dyslexia describe seeing text “swim together” on a page (the compressing of one line of text into the line below). They often see text merge or distort. To reduce their reading load use a larger font size, 11pt or larger.

- How: Click on the font size bar > Select a font size of 11pt or larger.

Add Table Header And Column Information
Why: To keep track of their location in a table, screen readers count table cells and use header information to identify rows and columns. If a table is nested within another table or if a cell is merged or split, the screen reader loses count and can’t provide useful information about the table. Blank cells in a table could also mislead someone using a screen reader into thinking that there is nothing more in the table.

Include Sufficient White Space
Why: In order to reduce workload for individuals with dyslexia, make sure there is ample white space between sentences and paragraphs

Request Accessible Emails
Why: If you wish to make sure you receive accessible emails, you can let the sender know that you prefer to receive accessible content.

- How: Click the settings icon on your Outlook on the web > In the search box type "Accessible Content" > Click on Accessible Content > Select the "Ask senders to send content that’s accessible" checkbox > Click save

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www.ndsu.edu/otl/faculty_resources/course_design/course_materials
**Insert Document Titles**

Why: Document titles provide information on what a user can expect to find in the document.

> **How:** File menu > Properties > Summary > Title > Enter descriptive title for your document.

**Use Alt Text For All Images**

Why: Screen readers cannot read photos without alt text or descriptions. Individuals may miss or wonder if they have missed important information.

> **How:** Click image > Picture Format menu > Format Pane > Layout & Properties (Alt > Alt text) > Alt text > Simple fill in title and description.

**Use Table Headers**

Why: Table headers explain the information in columns a screen reader reads. Without table headers, a screen reader reads accessibility issues, 10, 14, 15 versus “Book title accessibility issues, Page 10, Total pages 14, Number of follow up questions 3.”

> **How:** Insert menu > Table > Choose columns & rows + 1 extra row > Table Design menu > Ensure Header Row box is checked > Type column headers in first row of table

**Set Reading Order Of Slide Contents**

Why: Slide titles to navigate; they quickly scan slide titles and go right to the slide they want.

> **How:** Font color menu (Alt > Hover cursor over gray/black color choice > Choose a color that says “lighter 25%” or a lesser percentage. “Lighter 25%” means the tint is 75%. If you use anything more than 25% lighter, your document will be flagged for contrast issues.

**Use Unique Slide Titles**

Why: Individuals using a screen reader skim through slide titles to navigate; they quickly scan slide titles and go right to the slide they want. Using unique slide titles allows them to clearly understand which slide they are on.

> **How:** Design menu > Select a built-in slide template.

**Add Alt Text To All Images, Objects and Tables**

Why: For screen reader users, alternative text helps to communicate what is important in images and other visuals. Alt text provides a textual alternative to non-text content.

> **How:** Right click the image or object > Format picture/object, > Size & Properties (Alt > Size & Properties) > > fill in title and description explaining the object or image.

**Watch For Extra Spaces After Words**

Why: Extra spaces added after words or sentences can be read by a screen-reader as either “space” or “blank.” Neither convey meaning and can contribute to confusion.

> **How:** Make an effort to NOT add spaces after sentences; and, check for extra spaces, to your editing process. Place cursor at the end of each paragraph, use the right arrow key to see if there are extra spaces, and delete any you find.

**Use Usefulness Hyperlinks**

Why: Descriptive hyperlinks enable users to know what information they will receive if they click the link. A screen reader reads a link as, “link click here” versus “link how to fix accessibility issues.”

> **How:** Write a description of what the link provides > Highlight link text > Insert menu > Link > Click web or email option > Insert text or email address.

**Use Good Contrast**

Why: High contrast text is easier to read for sighted and low sighted individuals. If the document is black and white, use 70% tint for your gray/black colors. When using color, choose dark colors on a light background or light colors on a dark background. If you struggle to read the document, so will your readers.

> **How:** Font color menu (Alt > Hover cursor over gray/black color choice > Choose a color that says “lighter 25%” or a lesser percentage. “Lighter 25%” means the tint is 75%. If you use anything more than 25% lighter, your document will be flagged for contrast issues.

**Use Multiple Ways To Identify Information**

Why: Color is the only way to differentiate between items, low sighted, color blind, and sighted individuals may struggle to see the difference between each color. Variations in colors used by computer monitors and printers can be significant; and, when printed in black and white, color variation and meaning are lost.

> **How:** You can use color to differentiate but offer another differentiation tool. This could be numbers, letters, or other characters.

**Set Reading Order Of Slide Contents**

Why: For more information or assistance, contact:

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701-231-7015 | ndsu.otl@ndsu.edu

www.ndsu.edu/office/teachinglearning/course_design/course_materials
How(For Mac):
Open File in Adobe Acrobat DC > Click Tools > Accessibility > Accessibility Checker > Start checking > The system will automatically check for accessibility issues and show if there are any issues. To resolve issues simply right Click on the unresolved issue > Click Fix.

How(For Windows):
Open File in Adobe Acrobat DC > Click Edit > Preferences > Select Accessibility > Check the 'Replace Document Colors' box > Select "Use High-Contrast Colors" > From the dropdown list select "black text on white".

How(For Mac): Open File in Adobe Acrobat DC > Click Acrobat Pro DC > Preferences > Select Accessibility > Check the "Replace Document Colors" box > Select "Use High-Contrast Colors" > From the dropdown list select "black text on white".

How(For Windows): Right click on the PDF file > Select Properties > Advanced > Reading Order > Show Order Panel > Review the order. Double check that the PDF is reading the document in the intended order.

How: Click Tools > Accessibility > Accessibility Checker > Start checking > The system will automatically check for accessibility issues and show if there are any issues. To resolve issues simply right Click on the unresolved issue > Click Fix.

Set the Reading Order
Since the reading order is unique to each document, the accessibility checker is unable to fully check the reading order. Double check that the PDF is reading the document in the intended order.

How: Click Tools > Accessibility > Accessibility Checker > Start checking > The system will automatically check for accessibility issues and show if there are any issues. To resolve issues simply right Click on the unresolved issue > Click Fix.

How(For Mac): Right click on the PDF file > Select Properties > Advanced > Reading Options > Select "English" or the appropriate language the document is written in.

How(For Windows): Right click on the PDF file > Select Properties > Advanced > Reading Options > Select "English" or the appropriate language the document is written in.

Set The Appropriate Reading Language
Why: An appropriate language must be selected in the PDF properties so that the screen reader knows what language to read in.

How: Click File > Properties > Advanced > Reading Options > Select "English" or the appropriate language the document in written in.

Make Sure The Document Uses High Contrast
Why: Make sure that the document is in high contrast so that the text is easier to read for sighted and low sighted individuals. This means dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background.

How(For Mac): Open File in Adobe Acrobat DC > Click Acrobat Pro DC > Preferences > Select Accessibility > Check the "Replace Document Colors" box > Select "Use High-Contrast Colors" > From the dropdown list select "black text on white".

How(For Windows): Right click on the PDF file > Select Properties > Advanced > Reading Order > Show Order Panel > Review the order. Double check that the PDF is reading the document in the intended order.

Add A Title To The Document
Why: Having a document title makes it easier for someone using a screen reader to know what document they are listening to. If you missed this, you can still do this during the PDF accessibility check.

How: Click Document > Title > Control > Click > Fix > Uncheck "Leave as is" and change document title.

Set The Reading Order
Why: When converting documents into a PDF file. The first and most important thing is to ensure the document you are converting follows all accessibility standards. Once you have made sure there are no accessibility issues, follow these steps. The most important adjustments will be discussed below.

Save A Document As PDF
Why: In order to preserve the accessibility changes made in the PowerPoint or Word document, the PDF conversion has to be done in a specific way.

How(For Mac): Right click > Save As > Select PDF from the file format dropdown > In Microsoft word check the box labeled "Best for electronic distribution and accessibility" > Save.

How(For Windows): Right click > Save As > Select PDF from the file format dropdown > In Microsoft word check the box labeled "Document structure tags for accessibility" > Ok > Click save.

Use The Accessibility Checker Feature
Why: The Accessibility Checker feature will automatically check to see if there are any accessibility errors. If you have used the accessibility checker features in other platforms, you will have minimal adjustments to make in a PDF.

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Performance Objectives
What should the students be able to do?

What are instructional objectives?
Also refer to as learning objectives and performance objectives.
Instructional objectives are specific, measurable, short-term, observable student behaviors.
» An objective is a description of a performance you want learners to be able to exhibit before you consider them competent.
» An objective describes an intended result of instruction, rather than the process of instruction itself.

Writing objectives for using Bloom’s Taxonomy and associated action or performance verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Level</th>
<th>Associated Action Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>define, describe, state, list, name, write, recall, recognize, label, underline, select, reproduce, outline, match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>identify, justify, select, indicate, illustrate, represent, name, formulate, explain, judge, contrast, classify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>predict, select, assess, explain, choose, find, show, demonstrate, construct, compute, use, perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>analyze, identify, conclude, differentiate, select, separate, compare, contrast, justify, resolve, break down, criticize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>judge, evaluate, determine, recognize, support, defend, attack, criticize, identify, avoid, select, choose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis/Create</td>
<td>combine, restate, summarize, precise, argue, discuss, organize, derive, select, relate, generalize, conclude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 Parts of a performance objective:
Answer the question: “What should the students be able to do?”

Objective: The students will be able to infer the developmental needs of a child by documenting evidence aligned with developmental theory.

Adapted from resources found at:
www.bu.edu/cme/forms/RSS_forms/ tips_for_writing_objectives.pdf
https://tips.uark.edu/using-bloom’s-taxonomy/

Writing Course Objectives
What are course objectives?
Course objectives directly state what the students will know or be able to do by the end of the course. They ensure the instructor and students have a clear path through the course. All learning experiences and assessments should align to the course objectives.

Course objectives are:
» Specific
» Concise
» Student-centered
» Measurable
» Student-friendly
» Aligned with program objectives/goals

What does a course objective look like?

Example
The students will determine the developmental needs of children across all domains.

Note: the action verb guides assessment. For example, knowledge-level learning can be measured through limited-response quizzes or tests; while higher level learning can be measured with constructed response and projects.

Bloom’s Taxonomy
Although there are several taxonomies for learning, Bloom’s is the most widely known and used. Bloom’s Taxonomy serves as a useful resource for identifying the action verb needed for writing effective objectives. The following chart provides the six learning levels and examples of aligned performance verbs.

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www.ndsu.edu/otl
TIPS FOR FILMING VIDEOS

Whether you are filming a lecture for your class or a video for YouTube, there are some strategies you can use to ensure your video is of good quality. A video of good quality makes it easier for the viewer to receive your message.

Here are a few tips to ensure your video is of good quality.

Plan your video in advance
Planning your video in advance provides numerous advantages in terms of quality. The most important reason is that it decreases the amount of time spent filming and editing your video.

Follow a script
Write a script before recording. The script entails what you will talk about in the video. The video needs to be short, concise and to the point. So, write your script keeping that in mind.

Use good lighting
Preferably record in a shady area that will give a softer light. Avoid overhead lighting because that will cause harsh shadows on the subject’s face.

Use a clean background
An easy way to do this is to have a solid-colored background like a blank wall. If you do not have or do not want to use a clean background, be sure to check that background elements in the camera frame are representative of the message you want to send and are not distracting.

Film with minimal background noise
Depending on the microphone, lots of times microphones will record random noises like a fan, traffic, or background conversations. Record in a place free from those background noises.

Have good audio recording device
Borrow a microphone if needed and connect it to the camera. The Office of Teaching and Learning has microphones available to borrow.

Avoid shaky footage
It is not possible to have the camera handheld and not have shaky footage. It is best to use a tripod or set up a camera on a flat surface so your footage looks professional. The Office of Teaching and Learning has a tripod available to borrow.

Record with the best quality
Minimum quality should be 1080 pixels (px) at 30 frames per second (fps). Check your camera or phone to ensure it is recording at these settings. If you are using a phone to record be sure you have it set up horizontally rather than vertically.

Appear natural in front of the camera
Try to appear as natural as possible. Use open body language. Maintain good posture. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Avoid crossing your arms since this makes you look closed-off.

Speak slower
Individuals have a tendency to speak faster when they are on camera or in front of a crowd. Before you begin speaking pause and remind yourself to speak slower and enunciate tricky words.

Make sure to smile
A smile, especially at the beginning of the video, offers a sense of warmth and appears welcoming.

Look at the lense
Be sure to look at the lense of your camera or the general direction of the camera on your computer this is how your eyes will connect with your viewers eyes. If recording from your computer, it may help to tape a photo of a person near the lense.

GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START
Helping All Learners Feel Welcome

The learning environment sets the stage for learning. Here are a few ways to set up your learning environment to make your learners feel welcome and able to learn.

Comfortable Seating
Think of comfort broadly.
- The seating should establish opportunities for students to see and feel like they belong in the classroom.
- Can the seating be arranged in a circle to allow learners to see one another?
- Another option is to arrange the seating around a table or put desks in pods to encourage discussion and collaboration.
- Can you position yourself as the instructor in ways that allow you to be close to your learners, make eye contact, and see and hear them when you are talking and eliciting their ideas?

Look and Feel of the Room
Unlike our K-12 educator colleagues, higher education instructors typically don’t have their own classroom that can be customized to have a warm or personalized look and feel. However, there are things we can do to personalize the space we use.

For example:
- You can project an image and/or message that students see when they enter the room.
- You can add a message to the whiteboard, welcoming students and/or giving them something to think about related to the day’s learning.
- Another idea is to create learner toolkits that can be housed in the classroom or brought with you to class that include items that support thinking and discussion such as a mini-whiteboard, discussion prompts, response cards (Yes, No, Need More Information), activity protocols, resource sheets like a conversion chart or glossary, etc.
- Finally, consider creating a personal introduction for your students and inviting them to do the same. For example, post a photo and brief welcome that includes a glimpse into your interests and hobbies.

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Communication
Although Zoom and Teams meetings have made us more aware of the expressions on our faces and how the way we look may be perceived, educators are often under-aware of their non-verbal communication and tone. Plan for intentional:
- Position yourself near your students and work the room, so you aren’t only interacting with the students in your “splash zone.”
- Practice holding a warm, interested, and friendly expression on your face.
- Make eye contact with your students to show them you are listening and paying attention to them.
- Don’t be afraid to make a mistake or admit you do not know something. Instead, share with the students how you corrected the mistake or how you will learn what you don’t know.
- Finally, review your syllabus for messaging; perhaps even invite a colleague to review it, letting you know the tone they feel. Can you set high and clear expectations while maintaining a warm and approachable tone?

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Engagement is predictive of several positive academic and life outcomes including academic achievement, reduced drop-out rates, greater satisfaction with life, and a better overall sense of well-being. In fact, without opportunities for students to connect with learning in meaningful ways, they don’t learn. So, how can you make engagement more likely?

Engagement by design is an intentional approach to planning built upon the principle that every student deserves a learning experience with high levels of engagement.

Classroom Relationships
Relationships are among students and the content, peers, and instructor. Students are more likely to form a relationship with content when they can see how it is relevant, interesting, and useful. Positive relationships with peers that support engagement and learning require time and structure. Structure includes establishing guidelines for interaction that include respectful speaking and listening and worthwhile activities. Roger and David Johnson are experts in the field of cooperative learning with excellent resources on structuring collaborative interactions. Trust is the foundation of forming a relationship with your students. Trust is fostered when students see you as competent, which includes both knowing what you’re talking about and delivering on your promises. Students also trust instructors more who provide the instruction and feedback they need to succeed. In addition, relationships can be fostered with your students through sharing appropriate but personal information such as a photo and brief welcome that includes a glimpse into your interests and hobbies and inviting them to do the same.

Learner Voice
This includes listening, learning, and leading. Learners need to be taught how to listen to one another and provided with the structure for listening that includes expectations and modeling of respect and active listening. After hearing the ideas and perspectives of others, learners should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that they heard and learned from that experience. Finally, learners need opportunities in class to take responsibility for their own and others’ learning—not just passively intake content from the educator.

Student Value
Students need to feel like they belong along with being recognized, appreciated, and celebrated. Value is cultivated when student growth and accomplishment are recognized. Value is also furthered when a student knows others believe in them. Keep in mind that recognition can be private such as sincere and performance-anchored feedback on an assessment. Belief can be conveyed with statements that not only tell the student you believe in their abilities but also explain how you know this (eg. “I know you can do this. You have the knowledge and skills needed to complete this project. Let’s review what you know…”).

Clear and Worthy Content
Thoughtfully examine the content included in your class. Is it all important? Can you provide a strong rationale if asked “Why do we need to know this?” Once the worthy content is established, determine how you will clearly inform learners what they are expected to learn and what the success criteria look like.

Challenging Learning Experiences
Learners need an opportunity to rise to the challenge of learning the worthy content. Identify complex questions and problems for learners to grapple with. Help learners see the relevance in the content and the connections across the discipline.

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