

## How Do I Set Students up for Success in Online Courses?

Presented by:

**Jill Schiefelbein**

Owner, The Dynamic Communicator

Jill Schiefelbein is an award-winning author, former professor, and business owner. She taught business communication at Arizona State University for 11 years while being a pioneer in the online education space. Her first business, Impromptu Guru, helped people improve their presentation and public speaking skills. She created a YouTube series that was syndicated by Entrepreneur Network. She's a video partner and a contributor to *Entrepreneur Magazine*, as well as a livestream video personality. Her latest book, *Dynamic Communication: Strategies to Grow, Lead, and Manage Your Business* was published in early 2017.



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One way is by creating a START HERE area!

While we're on the topic, examples of each of the items (aside from a syllabus and quiz) that are discussed in the *20 Minute Mentor* video are available at this location:

<http://impromptuguru.com/start-here-area/>

*(Note: This handout is written from the perspective of the instructor.)*

Here are the **six items** that your START HERE area should contain, at a minimum:

1. Instructor introduction
2. Course expectations
3. Main assignment tutorials
4. Technology tutorials
5. Student engagement area
6. Syllabus quiz

*(A syllabus is assumed.)*

## Instructor Introduction

This is a video where you introduce yourself to your students. (Yes, you need to be on camera.) It is so important that students feel a real “human” connection early on in the course. This will make communication much easier going forward. When people can put a personality to their instructor, they can imagine conversations with you easier, which leads to a higher likelihood of students reaching out to you proactively or engaging with you in course content discussions.

Your introductory video should, at minimum, accomplish these things:

1. Establish rapport
2. Add the human touch
3. Personal and professional
4. What to call you
5. Why you love the course

## Course Expectations

This is a video of the instructor talking to students about the expectations that he/she has for them in the course. Also, it discusses the expectations that the students should have. It is important that you, at least initially, are on the video. But after introducing the purpose of the video it is okay to use voice-narrated slides if details are given. Sometimes this can reiterate the detailed information quite nicely. For example, start off with a 15 second clip of yourself introducing the video and its content, then use voice-narrated slides or images to deliver the content, then end with another 15-30 second video of yourself summarizing what was discussed and saying how you are looking forward to the session.

Here is what you should cover in the main content portion:

1. Establish ground rules
2. Unbreakable policies
3. Student conduct
4. Communication guidelines
5. Grading expectations
6. What to do if...

## Assignment Tutorials

These are video and/or audio supplements that go along with your assignment handouts. For example, if you use discussion boards in your course, you should make a discussion board guidelines video. This can cover how to use the technology (which combines it with the next area we'll talk about) and also your expectations for students. What's important is to provide your grading principles and assessment metrics. You don't have to delineate point values, but you should tell students how they will be graded and assessed. You can look at my video for an example.

<http://impromptuguru.com/start-here-area/>

Another good thing to do (which isn't shown in my video example, but is something I'm now adding to my new videos) is to give advice from the perspective of past students. That peer-to-peer commentary is often quite helpful for students.

For each main assignment (or main area of assignments) you should:

1. Add audio or video to text
2. Reiterate steps
3. Explain grading and assessment
4. Hints for success
5. Past students say...

## Technology Tutorials

Online instructors often are tasked with being both a teacher and a technical troubleshooter. Creating a “how-to” tutorial for each technology that you use in the class can significantly cut down on (or even eradicate) these troubleshooting-type emails and requests.

I like to use screen capture software, such as TechSmith’s Camtasia or Jing (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html> and <http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>), to literally walk students through how to use the technology. I also provide possible troubleshooting tips in the video. For me, this has practically eliminated questions relating to new technologies.

Make sure you are doing the following:

1. One for each “new” channel
2. Use screen captures to demo
3. Explain expectations for use
4. Give troubleshooting guidance
5. Eliminate confusion

## Student Engagement

When students are in an online class, research shows that they need three types of engagement or interactivity: student-to-content, student-to-instructor, and student-to-student. Make sure in your Start Here area you give students a chance to have all three types of interactivity. One good way is to have an introductory discussion, video posting, and/or hallway conversation area.

I like to use VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com>) at the beginning of each online class to have students make a video so everyone can put names and faces together. It really builds community. This way, also, I know that they know how to use the technology (and have paid attention to the tutorial) before the graded assignments start coming.

Another option, a hallway conversation area, is a place where students can interact with each other and the instructor. I encourage the use of multiple engagement forums or tools. Here is a description from an ASU Online class about this area:

*In a "face-to-face" course, there are a lot of things that go on around the classroom before and after class, the "Hallway Conversations" discussion forum replicates this environment.*

*This forum is for general questions about the course. This is a good place to ask questions about due dates, assignments, technology issues, and any other items related to the course in general. Please check to see if your question has already been asked before posting it. Also, you are encouraged to answer the questions of other students and socialize here.*

Here are some considerations for adding interactivity and student engagement:

1. Three interactivity types
2. Hallway conversation
3. Introductory activity
4. Channel for connection

### Syllabus Quiz

The syllabus quiz (or you can call it the Start Here Quiz) is essential. I actually know some teachers (myself included) who set it up so that until students get a perfect on the assessment they can't move onto the rest of the course.

I use the syllabus quiz to:

1. Emphasize important points
2. State a contract question:

*True or false: I certify that I have read, understand and agree to abide by all of the terms in the syllabus.*

By adding these elements into a "Start Here" or introductory area of your online course, you will be setting students up for success.

Remember, to see samples of each of these types of material, visit my website for real-course examples: <http://impromptuguru.com/start-here-area/>