Creating Distance Courses

Some considerations, concepts and ideas

Thanks to enablers and handlers…

Distance Design Education

Supporting the global community of distance design educators

This site has been set up to support design educators moving to distance and online teaching and is supported by the Design Research Society Pedagogy SIG and The Open University (UK) Design Group.
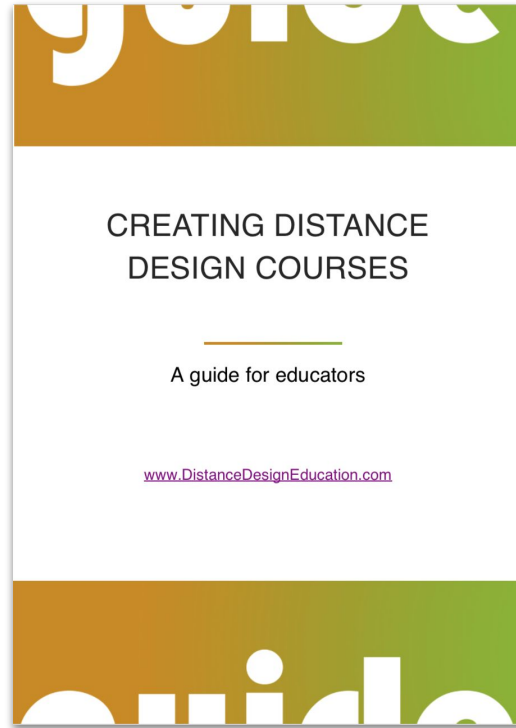
Recipes   Articles   Events   Meetups   Resources   Get involved

#DistanceDesignEd

www.distancedesigneducation.com

CREATING DISTANCE
DESIGN COURSES

A guide for educators

www.DistanceDesignEducation.com

https://distancedesigneducation.com/creating-distance-design-courses/

Prior assumptions

- Key differences in online education
- Assumptions in your course/subject
- Useful concepts
- Induction

our beliefs and dispositions can have an implicit effect on what and how we teach

(Bereczki and Kárpáti, 2018; Cheung and Leung, 2013).

Key differences

1

Perceptions of distance and online

Online is perceived by students as
cheaper (therefore less valuable/worthy), and
easier (Nichols, 2010; Nash, 2005; and Ashby 2004).

Slight imperfections (technology or interface) seen as a fault
of the learning design - lower tolerance to failure.

Similarly, when things work they are overlooked; when
something is missing it becomes a problem ('hygiene effect'
(Nichols, 2010)).

Key differences

2

You can't just transfer traditional to distance

Learning is not just what we 'see' - you don't 'see' with your eyes, you need to 'see' more than the material (Jones, 2013).

Learning is a bit more cognitively involved - it's an embodied cognitive experience (Dehaene, 2020). Use conceptual metaphors, not literal objects.

Bodily metaphors: up, down, back, forward, in, out,
Arch metaphors: home; studio; deskspace; breakout area; pinup wall; noticeboard; huddle;

Key differences

3 Learning, not teaching

Get away from synchronous by default: you don't have to be there for learning to take place...

Flip your model from teaching to learning.

Provide multiple modes/media of learning materials (esp for key/threshold concepts);
Induct your students into learning, demonstrate the value of that, and then trust them to get on with it;
Have multiple tuition and constructionist opportunities;

Key differences

4

Implicit needs to be explicit

May be obvious but : signals and signs of communication (especially meta-linguistic) are less obvious at a distance.

Be clear in your communications as an exemplar. Short, unambiguous sentences; efficient and effective language.

Explore your own implicit assumptions and declare them.

This can feel unnatural at first but you will get the habit of it and it will help reduce confusion.

Key differences

5

Misunderstanding is common in CMC

Just look at Twitter: misunderstanding (deliberate and otherwise) is practically a language or mode of engagement!

Humour, idiom, pejoratives all take time to develop. Work up to using these… (NEVER use in assessment comms!)

Students may have been taught to behave online in very different social spaces (see Catherine Cronin's work).

Top tip: ask questions instead of challenging/confronting;

Key differences

6 You need proper support

You cannot design a high quality online course on your own.

• Support best provided using complete external resources (e.g. lecture series; textbooks);
• Support best provided using existing, open resources and services (infrastructure and services, such as VLE, not outsourcing entire learning design over to someone else!);
• Support best provided at the institutional scale (i.e. that applies to all students, subject areas, etc.)
• Support best provided in subject clusters, departments, or faculties (e.g. design-specific support issues across multiple design disciplines)
• Support best provided across specific activity or content-based threads (e.g. practical or specialist provisions, such as labs, workshops, online studios, etc.)

Key differences

7

Online and distance are not the same

Distance design courses have been around for centuries - it's still possible to do distance via other media (we do…).

Conceptualise your learning design by distance first: this is the critical factor; not online (that's the default response to distance…)

Use distance concepts to inform your online design: isolation; proximity; presence; connection; etc.

Key differences

8

Retention rates and student dropout

Distance makes it harder to spot students considering dropping out and to intervene in this (Simpson, 2013);

The lack of proximity, engagement and presence leads to isolation (Moore 2009; Lamer 2009) - signal you are present.

Online can be seen as not real (Nichols, 2010; Nash, 2005; and Ashby 2004)

Studying at a distance is often undertaken part time and this can have a negative effect (NAO, 2007a)

Key differences

8

Retention rates and student dropout

Signal you are present.
Signal you are real (a real person!)
Create connections with students (proactively - not just open door).
Know your students' contexts and circumstances

Key differences

9

Attention, activity, and engagement

It's different online (it's also probably not what you think it is in lecture theatre either …). Cognitive attention online is mediated via a device and interface - students aren't just 'watching your lecture'…

Hooks and chunks
Multiple modes of material
Blended learning
Active learning
Flipping from teaching to learning
Induct students into **habits** of behaviour (ideally personalised)

Key differences

a

Emergency versus normal teaching

Student expectation will be very different for the next intake…

Teachers are angry, frustrated, confused, nervous about being forced to engage in completely different teaching modes. These are all valid feelings and they should not be ignored.

But, if we are diminishing these modes (implicitly and explicitly) then so will our students.

The problems are not with the mode: it's the quality of teaching.

Assumptions

1

Hidden curriculum …

Our (subject-based) prior assumptions about what students should already know:

Explicit: maths knowledge (or competencies???); analytical skills (or attitudes…); general arts background (or socio-economic presumption???)

Implicit (skills): IT literacies; software use (eg something as simple as Docs or Word);

Implicit (knowledge):

Implicit (modes): how [insert_subject_here] students best learn

Assumptions

2

… Invisible learning

Students learn far more than just 'learning outcomes':

Making learning visible (process, not output)
Legitimate peripheral learning (lurking; listening-in)
Social learning opportunities (comparing, contrasting)
Informal learning spaces (especially peer social learning)

Acknowledging and rewarding **learning** instead of outcomes...

Induction

1

Induction matters

Strong correlation between induction and student success/persistence (Edwards & Minton, 2009) (NAO, 2007) and many others...

Induction is not 'introduction', it's enculturation and preparation for studying at a number of 'levels' :
- Subject
- Higher education
- Distance educations
- Online education

All of these will **not be** what students were expecting...

Induction

2

Tone, character...

Learning is not just about content and remembering - how you present this matters

- Language use: informal, formal, technical, vague;
- Representation: gendered/ableist/neurotypical language;
- Representation in case study examples and use;
- Representation in images and image purpose;
- Visual language and identity of online services and sites.

Induction

3

... and atmosphere

How you then act and 'perform' during the course

- All of the things listed in tone and character (above)
- How you respond in online spaces
- Demonstrating consistency
- Avoiding dissonance (contrast between content and behaviours; 'what I say, not do';
- Teach by example (e.g. what you do in forums as a demonstration of the subject)

Induction

3

Tone, character...

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Useful concepts

1

… Invisible learning

- Hidden curriculum and Hidden learning
- Hooks and chunks
- Threshold concepts and learning
- Synchronicity
- Design personality
- Presence
- Social learning
- Critical pedagogy
- Constructivist / Constructionist learning