



# LEARNING TO TEACH ONLINE

## Considerations for choosing technology

### **Aims and overview**

*Knowing which technology to use for your online teaching can be difficult and sometimes overwhelming. This episode highlights issues you should keep in mind when making this decision. These include the importance of considering pedagogy before technology, the benefits of starting with something simple, and the need to provide adequate technical support and training for your students. To help you get started, it also includes links to a matrix guide, which outlines the educational application of different technologies in more detail.*



Watch the video  
<http://bit.ly/d18ac5>

Written by Karin Watson

**“When you use online components you can use multiple technologies, but the technology is just a means to an end, you need teaching strategies to support them.”** (Lubna Alam)

**“They [students] value technology when it adds to their learning, not when it is seen as a gadget and a bolt-on.”** (Professor Kerri-Lee Krause)

**“Sticking to the basics can be good for someone who is just getting to know an online learning environment...”** (Andrea North-Samardzic)

## Introduction

It is important also to remember that the Internet is not purely used in an educational context - it is part of our everyday life and has become integrated into contemporary society, and our teaching should reflect and acknowledge this. Introducing an online component to an educational environment can offer many benefits to teachers and students. However success often relies on how appropriate the chosen technology is for the context in which it is intended, and how well it is integrated into the learning process.

For the online learning and teaching experience to be effective, it is critical that any decisions regarding the choice of technology be well considered and informed, and that the online component be 'fit for purpose' and carefully integrated into the curriculum.

How you choose which technology to use can depend on a number of factors such as:

- *The intended learning outcomes for the course*
- *The students' situation (location, access to internet, number of students in the class, etc)*
- *The activities or technical requirements of the course content (eg inclusion of large graphic files, collaborative tools, live chat features, external guest lecturer access, file sharing, discussions, etc)*
- *The breadth and depth of the teacher's previous online experience*
- *The requirements or policies of the institution regarding the use of different online technologies*
- *Whether a centralised learning management system (LMS) or free, open web technology is available or preferable (refer to episode "[Learning management system or the open web?](#)" For more detail)*

## Research other examples

When you are new to online teaching the large number of technologies available can be quite overwhelming. It is often difficult to know where to start, how to determine which technology would be appropriate, and how best to use it in your teaching. In this situation it can be useful to first do some research by speaking to colleagues; reviewing similar case studies or scenarios; researching academic journals and papers that feature the use of these technologies or strategies in teaching; and checking your institution's learning and teaching website for advice, information on training sessions, seminars, etc.

## The importance of considering pedagogy before technology

It is important to examine the reasons for introducing an online component into your teaching – using it purely as a gadget because the technology is available does not guarantee a successful learning experience. Students value technology when it adds to their learning, not when it is used with no apparent relationship or benefit to how they learn. It is important therefore to consider the following issues:

- ***Establish the key pedagogical principles and then decide how technology can support them:*** For example, what are the learning outcomes, what do you want to achieve, what skills do you want students to

learn? Ask these questions and then decide how best you can integrate the technology in order to achieve or support these outcomes

- **Technology is just a means to an end:** When you teach online you can select from multiple technologies, however the technology is just a facilitator of the learning process - you still need to have sound teaching strategies in place to support the learning (refer to other [Context, Planning and Teaching episodes](#))
- **Activities should remain relevant to the learning process:** Be discerning - don't be caught up in allure of technology and its many features. Ensure that activities, tasks, etc have an educational purpose and stimulate learning.

## Educational Application of some common technologies and features

The University of New South Wales' (UNSW) Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching (TELT) website provides examples of the educational application of some common technologies and features and provides a useful matrix for matching learning outcomes with technology tools, and conversely how these tools can contribute to learning outcomes. This is by no means a definitive list, and serves as a starting point only. Please refer to the 'Additional Information' area later in this document for more examples.

[Click here to view the learning outcomes and technology tools matrix http://bit.ly/1qh0Jgc](http://bit.ly/1qh0Jgc)

## Start simple

If you are new to online teaching or do not have much experience, it can be useful to consider the following:

- **Stick to the basics:** While it is tempting to use every new tool and feature in your teaching, start slowly and build up your experience and confidence. It is better to introduce one component, use it appropriately, evaluate its success, and then adjust your teaching where necessary. Slowly introduce more components once you and/or the students are more comfortable with the technology
- **Use technologies that you are comfortable with:** Select one(s) that you are already using, or that are easy use or familiarise yourself with
- **Ensure that you are familiar with the technology before the semester commences:** This allows you to foresee any potential problems, adjust any content or tasks accordingly, and answer any questions that student may have when they start using the technology promptly
- **Limit the number of technologies used overall in any one class:** Using too many online components can be overwhelming and frustrating for the students (eg remembering several passwords, logging into different platforms, familiarising themselves with new features, etc) and distract from the learning experience.

## The importance of supporting and training your students

While many students are aware of the benefits of using technology in their daily lives for communication, socialising, banking, shopping and so forth, they may not always be as familiar or comfortable with using it for learning. As a teacher, it is important for you to:

- **Explain why you have introduced an online component:** Reiterate at the beginning of the semester the purpose of the technology, your reasons for selecting it, how it will benefit their learning, and what the expected learning outcomes are
- **Provide briefing sessions and supporting material:** Don't assume that students are familiar with the technology. Provide training sessions at the start for students and any additional teachers, as well as supporting documentation (written and/or video) that they can refer to throughout the semester
- **Support students throughout the semester:** Answer any technical questions promptly, introduce a Q&A thread online, provide a list of FAQ, and respond to any queries promptly to ensure that the technology does not hinder or frustrate the students' learning
- **Allow students to help one another:** Where appropriate, allow students to respond to one another's questions, and to share their technical expertise with the class.

## Conclusion

Making an informed decision about what online technology best suits your teaching can be critical to the success of your students' learning experience. It is important to ensure that carefully considered pedagogy takes precedence over technology. Also it is advantageous to research which tools or features best facilitate the learning process and outcomes. Similarly, it is important to provide adequate support and training for your students when introducing new online components, and to limit the number of technologies used at any one time.

## Additional information

The University of New South Wales Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching examples of good practice [www.telt.unsw.wikispaces.net/Good+practice+examples](http://www.telt.unsw.wikispaces.net/Good+practice+examples)

Deakin Studies Online: Contemporary online teaching cases

[www.deakin.edu.au/itl/teach-learn/cases/index.htm](http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/teach-learn/cases/index.htm)

[www.deakin.edu.au/itl/teach-learn/cases/files/2003oltf/2003cases.htm](http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/teach-learn/cases/files/2003oltf/2003cases.htm)

Educating the New Generation: Implications for learning and teaching in Australian Universities

[netgen.unimelb.edu.au/overview/index.html](http://netgen.unimelb.edu.au/overview/index.html)

Journal of Research on Technology in Education (JRTE)

[www.iste.org/learn/publications/journals/jrte.aspx](http://www.iste.org/learn/publications/journals/jrte.aspx)

Meaningful Learning and the Participatory Web: Tools and Tactics  
[learningaloud.com/participatoryweb/toolstactics.html](http://learningaloud.com/participatoryweb/toolstactics.html)

Socialbrite: Social media glossary  
[www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/glossary](http://www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/glossary)

### **Additional reading\***

Anderson, P. (2007). What is Web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for education. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/4mb464p>

Grabe, M., & Grabe, C. (2007). [Integrating technology for meaningful learning](#). (5th ed.), New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company

Kennedy, G., Dalgarno, B., Bennett, S., Judd, T., Gray, K., & Chang, R. (2008). [Immigrants and Natives: Investigating differences between staff and students' use of technology](#). In Hello! Where are you in the landscape of educational technology? Proceedings ASCILITE Melbourne 2008.

Kennedy, G., Dalgarno, B., Gray, K., Judd, T., Waycott, J., Bennett, S., et al. (2007). [The net generation are not big users of Web 2.0 technologies: Preliminary findings](#). In ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning. Proceedings ASCILITE Singapore 2007 (pp. 517-525).

Knight, S. (2009). Effective Practice in a Digital Age. Retrieved from <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticedigitalage.pdf>

*\*Note: Some readings are held in subscription only databases. In most cases accessing the link from your institution's network will enable access*

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## For more Learning to Teach Online, visit the COFA Online Gateway



To find out more about the Learning to Teach Online project, or to view the video component of this episode, please visit the COFA Online Gateway.

[www.online.cofa.unsw.edu.au](http://www.online.cofa.unsw.edu.au)

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### About the project

The [Learning to Teach Online](#) project is a free professional development resource designed to help teachers from any discipline, whether experienced in online teaching or not, to gain a working understanding of successful online teaching pedagogies that they can apply in their own unique teaching situations. It hopes to encourage dialogue, discussion and the sharing of ideas about online learning and teaching across disciplines and between institutions around the world.

### About COFA Online

COFA Online is an academic unit at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia. It has been innovating online pedagogy, academic professional development and effective online learning strategies since 2003.

### About The University of New South Wales

UNSW has an enrolment of approximately 40,000 students, and is the leading international university in Australia with over 10,000 international enrolments from over 130 nations. UNSW was also ranked as the top university in 2009 in the Australian Government Learning and Teaching Performance Fund for the quality of its teaching.



### Australian Learning and Teaching Council

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