

PRE-SEMESTER CHECKLIST FOR 100-LEVEL ONLINE INSTRUCTORS

Note: All online courses at UA go through a rigorous development and review process every three years. A&S must ensure that these courses comply with our accreditation standards and CCS must renew copyrights for all materials each semester, which is why we strive to maintain consistency across all sections of our courses. Because of this, the following things **should remain the same:**

- Course policies and syllabus content, including schedule and assignment values.
- Number and depth of writing assignments, discussion posts, and homework assignments.
- Module content: readings, assignments, instructions, and prompts.

Send suggestions to the online coordinator, [Natalie Loper \(nloper@ua.edu\)](mailto:nloper@ua.edu).

****BEFORE THE SEMESTER BEGINS** Please Read!**

Pre-Semester FAQ's & Steps

Do I need to order TEXTBOOKS for this course?

No—the Online Coordinator will submit all textbook orders before the semester begins.

Students are emailing me about OVERRIDES. What do I tell them?

Give them the email address of the Online Coordinator, nloper@ua.edu. You may forewarn them that the answer is almost always “no” if you want, but please say nothing else about their chances.

What do I need to “CHECK” on before the semester starts?

The only thing you should need to visually verify before the semester begins is that your name is on the Course Homepage and Syllabus. If this information is not there, email CCS tech support at techsupport@ccs.ua.edu. You should also have access to a copy of the books.

What do I need to “READ” before the semester starts?

Read the syllabus and schedule carefully. Be sure that you understand the grading standards and expectations. It is also recommended that you read through each module, paying close attention to the prompts of the Homework Assignments, Discussion Threads, and Essays.

What do I need to “DO” before the semester starts? You will need to:

- 1) Create Turnitin Assignments for the 6 Writing Assignments (major essays). See the attached handouts for how to create Turnitin assignments.
- 2) Edit the Due Dates for your homework Assignments. See the attached handout for how to adjust due dates in Blackboard Assignments.
- 3) Review the Mail option; this is an important component of communication. (To see whether you have new mail within Blackboard, click “My Courses” on the Blackboard main page. A box in the upper right corner lists new mail messages.)
- 4) Download and familiarize yourself with Blackboard IM.
- 5) Send your students a pre-semester email: Introduce yourself to the class, provide book information, and explain how the course works, with clear deadlines, etc. Also make the first post in the “Introductions” Discussion Thread, to introduce yourself. Either now or during Module 1, remind students that all work (homework, discussions, and essays) must be NEW work, even if they have taken this course (or one like it) in the past. Any recycled work will be considered Academic Misconduct.

6) Finally, go through the course by clicking on all of the links and reading everything; you want to make sure that nothing is accidentally hidden or erroneous. If you encounter any broken links, contact CCS via email (techsupport@ccs.ua.edu). Double-check that everything syncs up—especially due dates. This means that you should open each discussion, each assignment, and each Turnitin assignment.

Can I make a Welcome VIDEO?

Yes, you can make an appointment with the CCS studio or use Tegrity.

FIRST-DAY FAQ's and INSTRUCTIONS:

What do I do on the **FIRST DAY**?

Make sure you've completed the necessary steps above.

Do we use Email or Blackboard "MAIL"?

Always use Blackboard Mail, so that there is a record of course correspondence. (But check your regular email consistently for messages from the Online Coordinator, and to make sure that students aren't emailing you instead of Blackboard Mailing you.)

When are assessments **AVAILABLE**?

CCS Tech / Testing will make the Discussion Boards and homework assignments available, so you shouldn't have to touch that. YOU will make sure the Writing Assignments (major essays) are all available, since you're creating the Turnitin Assignments.

Because this is a writing class and assignments are designed to build on each other, students should keep to the course schedule as closely as possible. Working ahead or turning in late work will mean that they lose valuable feedback from their peers and instructor.

What is the policy on **LATE WORK**?

This is described on the syllabus in the "Policy on Late Work." You'll notice that this is pretty vague, because essentially, accepting late work is up to you. Best practice is that we don't accept late work unless informed by the student of the need for an extension ahead of time.

How **OFTEN** do I need to check my Course and Mail?

Keep in mind that you will need to give frequent feedback throughout the semester. **Be present in your class!** Check for email / messages every weekday. You should generally send responses / feedback **within 36 hours**. Return grades and feedback within a reasonable timeframe. Keep your tone professional. Remember, things can be misconstrued in online forums. Be clear, friendly, and helpful in your communication.

What's the best way to communicate with my whole class?

You can email students through the *Mail* feature, but they will only be able to read messages through Blackboard. You can also create *Announcements* by clicking on the + sign at the top left of your course, add Tool Link, Announcements. When creating an announcement, you can select a box to email the class immediately; this will send the message to their email accounts and also keep a copy of the announcement in Blackboard. You can also set Announcements to open and close as you wish.

What about the **GRADEBOOK**?

Keep up with your grade book: enter zeroes for missed assignments and make sure grades roll over from Turnitin and other assignment pages. It's also a good idea to keep an additional electronic or paper grade book.

What about **OFFICE HOURS**?

There are many ways to have “virtual” office hours, including giving students your office phone number (if applicable) or simply meeting local students in your real office. **But the best way to do this is to use “Blackboard IM.”** It's a real-time chat box in which students can message you with questions, and you can respond back immediately. It's not difficult to use—just follow the directions on the left-hand menu of your “MY INSTITUTION” page in Blackboard and contact CCS if you have problems. The least time-constraining way to do office hours is to tell students in a message: “I'm more than willing to work with you if you have questions! Please download Blackboard IM and let me know if you'd like to set up a time for us to both log in and chat.” (Some people just announce that they will be logged into Blackboard IM from 10:00-11:00 on Tuesdays/Thursdays, but a permanent set time is not necessary.)

What do I do if I suspect Academic Misconduct?

If you think a student may have plagiarized, contact the Online Coordinator immediately. Please read the procedures here: <http://comp.ua.edu/handbook/plagiarism.htm#theprocedure> (login: FWP password: teacher)

Important Reminders

- 1) Post midterm and final grades by the deadlines. You should get email reminders about these deadlines. We recommend entering ONLY grades of A, B, C, or NC, with appropriate plusses and minuses. Enter a grade of NA only if a student has never logged into the course or submitted any work at midterm. Please do not enter a DO because students sometimes “drop out” of online classes for a while but later come back and want to submit essays. Instructors are required to grade all work, even if the student will not pass the class.
 - 2) Check your A&S email regularly so you do not miss important information.
 - 3) Remind students when course evaluations are available. For FWP courses, students will fill out two surveys. You should get email reminders about these evaluations. To get maximum participation, you may need to send multiple reminders.
 - 4) Contact the online coordinator (Natalie Loper nloper@ua.edu) with any questions about the course content, grading, or student issues.
- Contact Tech Support (techsupport@ccs.ua.edu) with any technical issues. CCS (College of Continuing Studies) is responsible for most of what goes on in these courses. Please do not use the Mail feature of Blackboard to contact tech support; they do not monitor or read emails sent within courses.