Read – Watch – Complete: Adding Structure to a Very Unstructured Transition to Online Learning

Introduction (why this is important to teaching)

Amid the semester, both teachers and students had to adapt quickly to the unexpected transition to online course delivery. While this could be an overwhelming transition for some, consistency and clarity become paramount to ease any additional stressors on both the instructor and the class participants. It is important to remember that most students have had to manage four to six courses, all with very different online landscapes. Therefore, having a consistent approach to the online learning course shell can provide a safe place for students to land amidst the challenges of navigating so many changes at once.

Procedure (the how-to)

One way to help support student success is to use a consistent structure when forming your online course shell, whether it be a quick transition to online learning or if you have longer to prepare. Using Modules, within a course shell, is one easy step to provide students with a sense of uniformity in a class and it also lends itself to help students see the progression they make throughout content. Modules can either be formed around course units or by the week. I have found that organizing Modules around a week is very well received by students because a week's worth of work is a doable goal to achieve and there is a clear start and end date to complete the requirements.

With the module, clear expectations are a must. This is where the Read – Watch – Complete organizational structure comes into play. Within each weekly module, there are subheadings for what students should be reading that week, watching that week, and completing that week. The 'reading' section can include chapters in the assigned textbook, websites, or other secondary sources. I have found it helpful to provide "Active Reading Sheets" with each required reading, to help guide the student through the passages and to highlight important focal areas in the text. These also provide great study material for the students as they prepare for exams.

The 'watch' section can include prerecorded lectures or videos from secondary sources to supplement the content being covered. Students seem to appreciate hearing the content directly from the instructor, while also receiving other perspectives from outside accompanying videos. Like the "Active Reading Sheets", students are provided with guided notes to help provide structure to note taking as they watch the videos for the

week. This helps keep the students focused and on-track while watching the videos; also helping them zero in on important content they will need for future assessments.

Finally, the 'complete' section can include any assignments, assessments, or checklists that are due within the next week. The assignments and assessments are clearly outlined with consistent due dates (e.g., Sunday at 11:59 PM EST each week). Having a consistent due date at the end of the week provides the student with peace of mind when planning out their weekly schedule, which is very important when they are completing multiple classes at once. The checklists included in the 'complete' section provide guidance for group projects or individual projects that contain several steps throughout the semester. This helps keep students on-track, even when an actual assignment is not due that week.

Assessment (why do-you believe that the tip works and improves teaching)

While the transition to online learning this past semester was completed in a quick and unexpected manner, using the Read – Watch – Complete method helped ease students' nerves once they got settled into the remote delivery of the course. Questions about logistics or expectations were rarely received from the class' sixty students because they were able to quickly and easily latch onto this new systematized approach. Several students even reached out in the first few weeks of the transition to praise the organization of the class, claiming that it helped ease their tension about the unknown. They also shared that this approach allowed them to stay motivated because the expectations for the course were clearly laid out and they could see the progress they were making towards the learning objectives. Overall, this simple, streamlined method can help add some structure to a very unstructured time in higher education.

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