

Engaging strategies and examples

The following artefacts are examples of common strategies that can be used to engage students in an online course. These artefacts can be used in several moments of the course, and should occur in a systematic way (e.g. every time a new unit starts, end of week/topic feedback). Below you'll find some strategies, a short description and examples produced by our course teams.

1. In the beginning, to welcome your students

1.1. Welcoming email

The welcoming email is very important to get things started. You can use it not only to inform students about general practicalities of the course, but also to motivate, start building a learning community and show that you're there to guide, give feedback, support and answer any question. This helps building confidence, a crucial element when fostering the development of an online learning community. It's important to send this message using their private email addresses, to be sure they will receive the message.

Example: Welcoming email from the e-Moderation course

Dear future e-moderator,

First of all I would like to thank you for joining the "e-Moderation: guiding your online students" course.

My name is Nelson and I'll be the course e-moderator. During the coming 3 weeks I'll be guiding you throughout the course, providing feedback and fostering the development of a learning community.

The course was designed to provide you with a meaningful and pleasant learning experience, focusing on 1 weekly learning activity that requires only 2-3 hours of effort, spread throughout the week. We designed different types of activities that require individual work but also interaction and collaboration with others, in order to enrich your learning experience and "feel" what it is to be an online student. Soon you'll have more detailed information about what to expect from the course, and what the course expects from you ;-)

The course officially starts this Tuesday, March 1st at 12:00. Access to the course will be given the day before so you can start familiarizing with the learning environment and meet your fellow colleagues.

This is it for now. If you have any questions feel free to ask.

Looking forward to meet you online ;-)

Kind regards,

Nelson & Linda

1.2. Introductory video

You can also reinforce your welcoming message by creating an introductory video. It could be a general course and teacher introduction or something more specific, like for example an invitation to participate in the Forum.

AE4ASM505 Non-Linear Modeling (using F.E.M.) (2015-2016 Q3) by Dr. Sonell Shroff | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmbmpCVxPhU> (first 3 minutes)
TXT1x Text Mining & Analytics invitation to join the Forum | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o_eOlu9Y5c

2. During the course, to activate and provide support

2.1. Learning activity explanation

All learning activities should have clear textual instructions in order to avoid student's questions regarding what to do. Unclear instructions are a barrier for students to start learning and you as an e-moderator will receive many questions. In this way, creating additional content can benefit, especially when the task is rather complex. A video explaining the assignment can be produced, or even a live session for Q&A using Google Hangouts or Skype, although the forum might also be used for this purpose.

You can also produce extra content on demand, like for example when students are struggling with an exercise and need your explanation. This strategy attends student's specific needs, while sharing with them the way you think regarding a certain problem/exercise. This can easily be done with a screen recording software.

Example: TXT1x Text Mining & Analytics visual walkthrough lab assignment | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4u19bP2h0A> (first minute)

2.2. In-course communication (motivational announcement/message in the forum)

These messages are simple to produce by the teacher and can have a big impact on students motivation and participation. They can be seen as the most common form of daily communication with your students. To give you an idea of when to use which tool, the forum should be seen as the heart of the online course, where regular communication occurs, while the announcement should be used to launch activities, as a reminder and sometimes in specific moments where you, as an e-moderator, feel that it's important (e.g. due to general student absence in the course).

Example: Weekly wrap-up and start new module announcement from profEd course Smart Structures by Renee van de Watering

Dear learners,

How are you? I hope you have all enjoyed module 1 of the Smart Structures course.

I have seen that all of you have submitted Assignment A of the course, well done! Roeland and Jurij will provide feedback to your assignments before Thursday, and we can discuss it further in the Google Hangout if you would like.

In last week's Google Hangout we had a some very nice introductions and a nice discussion on the definition of Smart Structures. Unfortunately we did not manage to record the session this time. We hope to have solved this issue now and we should be able to record the next Hangout. For the next Hangout on the 9th of June, we will post a link on the community, that you can follow to get into the Hangout.

I would like to ask you to take a few minutes to fill in the 'Take-away & Conclusion' section of module 1. This way you can connect your new knowledge to your current profession. When you have filled it in, Roeland will share his views on this. We will only use the discussion board for this activity, any other discussions can take place on Google+.

Module 2 has just gone online, so enjoy the new material!

Kind regards from the entire courseteam,

Renee van de Watering

Example: Motivational announcement from AE3534 Spacecraft Technology by Dr. Angelo Cervone

Dear students,

thank you very much for your useful Wiki contributions to the propulsion part of the course! I really enjoyed reading them.

For most of you, the exercise is a "pass" and you are therefore admitted to the exam. Only in a few cases, I had to contact some of you to ask for adjustments/additional contributions.

Thus: if you have not received any e-mail from me so far, you can consider your Wiki a pass and not take any further actions. Those of you who instead have to take actions, have been contacted and should already have received an e-mail from me.

Kind regards and good luck for the exam!

Angelo

Example: Message in the Forum from the e-Moderation course

Hi everyone,

The first learning activity of this course is a discussion about the role of the e-moderator. As described in the instructions, the discussion will be based on your thoughts/experience, the educational resources provided and extra material (optional) you can find on the Internet to deepen your understanding of the topic.

Three questions to discuss have been created in this forum. This is our starting point, since other questions may naturally arise during the week, taking into account all the insights you're expected to bring to deepen the discussion.

Let's starts? Looking forward to read your thoughts and follow the discussion.

See you later, Nelson

2.3. Spark

The spark is an element to use in the beginning of a unit or learning activity, to trigger your students to study a certain topic, showing its relevance and/or real-world application. It could be an image or a quote, a video or even a question to rise discussion in the forum. Although it's common to think of the spark in the course design process, it's a great example of how to engage online students with your content.

Example: TP101x The Basics of Transport Phenomena | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWdQhWRdymg>

Example: Calc001x Pre-University Calculus | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3R7hhQFM4Y>

2.4 Online live session (hangout)

The live session is a powerful way to add interactivity and individual feedback to a course. Immediate communication with the lecturer is a high quality addition to a course. The TU Delft offers hangouts only in online professional and online academic courses, so not in MOOCs.

Participants are in different time zones, so we try to find a time slot which fits most people. We never add a hangout as an obligatory element in a course, but always as an optional element. A short agenda is published beforehand:

Example: Agenda and screenshots from the Smart Structures ProfEd course


Agenda Hangout 4

- Risk assessment of morphing technologies
- Mapping of SARISTU topics onto the Smart Structures course
- Biomimetics in multifunctional materials
- Other cool technologies that you found when exploring the SARISTU project
- Questions from the audience
- Take-aways from this course









Engaging strategies and examples for e-Moderating by Nelson Ribeiro Jorge & Linda Mebus, June 2019, TU Delft. Contact: online-learning@tudelft.nl. This work by TU Delft Extension School is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

2.5. Challenge (can also be used as a spark)

Giving your students interesting and catching problems to solve is a great way to engage them with your content. Using the word “challenge” brings some game spirit which is by definition commonly engaging. A challenge is a problem to be solved and giving it to your students is a way of saying “you can do it”.

Example: EX101x Data Analysis: Take it to the MAX() Bacon challenge |
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv0neITecw4>

3. In the end, to give feedback and wrap-up

3.1. Feedback video/text

At the end of the week you should provide feedback to participants regarding the most important aspects discussed or realized in the course. You can provide a summary, general feedback to all group, the main takeaways or maybe even explain a difficult concept, question or exercise where many students struggled. This can be done using the Forum (e.g. when the activity was based on discussion) or by video (e.g. for more complex learning activities).

Example: DDA691x Product Design: The Delft Design Approach Sofa Session |
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbSpp96Rb1A>