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TECHNICAL SUPPORT IN ONLINE COURSES

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides educators with a checklist to follow when preparing an online course, and avoid common technical difficulties that are often faced during these classes. Additional references for further research on the topic can be found at the end.

This information applies to all types of online teaching: synchronous, asynchronous or hybrid

1. Recommendations from the IDEA Quality Assurance Framework

Course design and preparation:

- The course is designed taking into consideration the fact that it may be attended by students with limited bandwidth. Materials are kept of a reasonable size to ensure easy access and/or download. The course platform should be easily accessible even with limited bandwidth
- Whenever possible, materials are shared in advance to avoid technical problems for downloading and/or offering the possibility for the students to prepare in advance

Course delivery

- Whenever possible, technical support is available throughout the course and students know how to claim it



2. Examples and recommendations

2.a. Course design

While an educator is preparing his/her course, there are certain issues that he/she can review or test in advance and make sure that the course will run without major interruptions due to technical issues.

- Inform well in advance the students about the equipment, platforms, software, and digital skills they will need to use during the course
- Introduce the students to induction and onboarding classes, resources, and support portals on the use of online educational platforms and tools
- Run “user experience” tests with different people to make sure that different perspectives are taken into consideration when it comes to the usability of the platform or other online tool
- If possible, communicate in advance any passwords or other accessibility requirements that the students might need
- Ensure that the online content can be presented and work with at least the most common operating systems
- Make sure that the online content can be presented in different devices (laptops, PCs, mobile phones etc.)
- Make sure that additional features (video, audio, high resolution pictures) can still be viewed or downloaded by those with limited bandwidth
- Check that the icons, images, videos and other instructions used to guide the learning process are familiar to the students, and they can easily interpret and follow them
- Ensure a balanced mix between synchronous and asynchronous classes, to provide students with some flexibility and cost efficiency in accessing learning materials
- If possible, attend training on regular basis to keep up with updates in educational technologies

2.b. Course delivery

Most of the preparation is done in order to make sure that there will not be any technical problems while the course is running. In the case that such problems appear it is important to:

- make it easy for the students to seek technical support while the course is running and have the respective services (phone numbers or emails) available to them during the course
- make the recordings of the course available promptly to the students who faced technical problems in order to follow it on their own time

3. Additional material

The links below are being provided as a convenience and for informational purposes only; they do not constitute an endorsement or an approval by the IDEA partners

- An article that reviews and discusses the requirement, challenges and possible measures to provide technical adequacy and support during online learning: Nawaz, A., & Khan, M. Z. (2012). Issues of technical support for e-learning systems in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science*, 4(2), 38.
- A professional article that discusses possible strategies and measures to provide required technical support before, during and after online classes: Shamsy, J. (2014, July). A Balancing Act Part II: Providing technical support before, during and after the online course. *Elearn Magazine*. <https://elearnmag.acm.org/featured.cfm?aid=2653381>



Please have a look at the IDEA project fiche “The golden rules of online examination to avoid technical difficulties” for information on this topic during the evaluation/examination phase of an online course.



