A Guideline for Teaching Online Math Courses,
by Xianwei Van Harpen

There are many misconceptions about teaching online courses. For example, some instructors think that one is lucky to teach an online class because students just need to work on their own. The truth is that students don’t always know how to learn on their own. In fact, they need more support because of the lack of face-to-face interaction with the instructor. Also, some instructors think weekly reminders are just a waste of time as students would just get tired of them. In my experience, my online students are very grateful of the regular reminders. Below, I listed all the things that worked well in my teaching of online math courses. I believe they will help future instructors and students have a very positive experience with online math courses.

Golden advice 1: Not all students check emails.

Golden advice 2: Students don’t always understand the message you send them the first time they read it. Repeated emails are necessary.

Golden advice 3: Since we are paid the same amount of money without lecturing or grading, we really should have more patience and take the time to send nice emails to our students. If necessary, we should call individual students to find out why they are not making progress.

1. Before the semester starts, email your students the following:
   - A welcome letter with a brief introduction of yourself, how you want to be addressed (Ms. Smith, Mr. Smith, Dr. Smith, etc.), and the best way to reach you (email, phone, office hours, etc.)
   - Feel free to send a picture of yourself and even your family to your students
   - Syllabus
   - Course calendar (with detailed due dates)
   - Instruction on how to sign up on the online learning system

   Note 1: Since students continue to register after your initial email, you need to keep checking your router on PAWS and email the new students the things above. You can stop once the deadline to add to your course is past due.

   Note 2: Upload all the materials onto D2L, even if your online learning system has a resource function

2. How to email your students
   - Panther list is your best friend. Just to make sure it has the right setting. Otherwise it does not allow attachments.
   - Copy and paste your students’ email address (you will need to keep updating the list as students drop or add)
   - Always use “bcc” instead of “to” or “cc”
   - ALEKS email does not allow students to email you back directly
3. **If you are an online learning system**
   - Windows “Snipping Tool” is your best friend
   - For ALEKS users, provide course code to your students (XXXXX-XXXXX) and your students need to purchase an access code (XXXXX-XXXXX-XXXXX-XXXXX)
   - Provide detailed instruction on how to “learn” via the system: watch videos, read the e-book, complete the homework/quizzes/tests/practices
   - Provide instruction/samples on writing down steps in a nice binder or notebook instead of loose scratch papers
   - Provide instruction on how to check gradebook on the system
   - Provide customer support email or phone number in case students get into trouble with the system and you are not available or not capable of helping out

   *Note:* All the information should be uploaded on D2L, too.

4. **Keep active and regular communication with your students**
   - Get yourself into the habit of sending regular emails on homework, quizzes, etc. It is hard to remember assignment due dates for online students. It doesn’t take long to do that once you have a panther list created and memorized.
   - Don’t be afraid of calling some of your students if necessary. You can download a list of student addresses and phone numbers on PAWS. Use a campus phone.
   - Make sure your students hear from you at least once a week!

5. **Mid-term exam and final exam**
   - Ask the department to reserve a computer lab for your mid-term exam. If necessary, request two days (Kim usually will get this done a few weeks into the semester. Just use “TBA” on the syllabus and calendar)
   - If your class size is bigger than the capacity of the computer lab, offer two or three sections of the exam per day and ask students to sign up on one of them. (for example, 9:00-noon, 1:00-4:00)
   - Make sure to schedule the first mid-term exam before the university drop date. Final exams must be given during the university final exam period. Make sure to stick to the scheduled date to give the exam.
   - Make sure you figure out the midterm and final dates and reserve the rooms BEFORE the term starts, and put the correct dates/times on the syllabus you give to the students at the start of the term!
   - For students who cannot come to the exam on campus, allow local proctoring. You will receive a sample proctor form template. Modify it to include your class # and your name / email! If you aren’t using aleks you’ll need to modify it as appropriate for your course. If you are using an online final exam, make sure to use a password for the exam. Call or email the proctors to share the password.
• Make sure to check photo IDs before the exam. If a student forgets to bring his or her photo ID, take a picture of the student with your phone or a camera and tell them to email a picture of their photo ID so you can see if the two pictures show the same person.
Appendix A: How to use pantherLIST
Step 1: Go to www4.uwm.edu
Step 2: Click more on the top right corner
Step 3: Click pantherLIST
Step 4: log in
Step 5: Click “Class Email List” at the left bottom
Step 6: Pick the class list and created the list

Appendix B: How to find the “Snipping Tool”
Step 1: Go to “all programs”
Step 2: Go to “Accessories”
Step 3: Click “Snipping Tool”

Appendix C: How to find students’ phone numbers
Step 1: go to PAWS and find your class roster
Step 2: at the bottom of the list, you will see “view class list with addresses”
Appendix D: Welcome letter

Dear student, welcome to Math xxx-xxx!

I am your instructor Mrs. Xianwei Van Harpen. Please feel free to address me as Mrs. Van Harpen, or simply Xianwei (pronounces “Shenway”).

In this course, we are going to use a Web-based, artificially intelligent assessment and learning system called Assessment and LEarning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS). To make sure that you have a successful semester, it is important that you get the following two things done before the first day of the semester Monday, Jan. 25th, 2016:

- Have an ALEKS account active (see detailed instruction in the syllabus)
- Complete the initial assessment on ALEKS. I suggest that you take the initial assessment seriously as it will show how much of the course content you have already mastered.

If you have any question about the course at this point, please feel free to email me. I look forward to working with you this semester and help you succeed in this course.

Your instructor: Mrs. Van Harpen
Email: xxxxxx     Work phone: xxxxxxxxxx     Office: xxxxxxx

Appendix E: Email template for weekly reminders

Hi Math 098 online class,
Just a reminder that, as usual, you have homework due on ALEKS tomorrow (Friday).
Let me know if you have any questions. I am here for you!
Have a great day!

Xianwei

Appendix F: Email to exam proctors

Hi, Stacy,
To proctor the exam for Kasey Smith, you will need the password "xxxxxxxx" to unlock the exam "Online Math 098 Final Exam". The student is allowed to have 3 hours for the exam. Please make sure to not share the password with anybody.
During the exam, the student can use a scientific calculator. No graphing calculator is allowed. The student should not have any device that is connected to the internet, including cell phones. Scratch papers are allowed.
If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at xxxxxxxxxx or email me at xxxxxxxxxx

Thanks!

Xianwei Van Harpen
Appendix G: Email for exam sign-ups

Hi, Math 098 online students!

I hope you had a great weekend!

As listed in the syllabus, our mid-term exam is coming up on Thursday, Mar. 10th. You are required to come to campus to take the exam in a computer lab (EMS E425) on ALEKS. **There are limited number of seats in the lab. Please let me know which session below works for you before Friday, Feb. 26th.**

**Session 1: 9:00 a.m. to noon**
**Session 2: 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.**
**Location: EMS Building E425**
**Only a scientific calculator is allowed. No graph calculator is allowed.**

If you cannot make it to the exam on campus, there is an option of using other proctors to take the exam off campus. You will need to get the approval process completed no later than Mar. 3rd. I will explain to you more if you are interested.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Mrs. Van Harpen
Appendix H: Proctor Approval Form (You will receive a Word version)

You will receive a Word version.