



CONESTOGA
Connect Life and Learning

Teaching and Learning

Early Course Check-in - Taking Action

Winter 2021 Edition

At Conestoga College, we are deeply invested in your teaching success.

Faculty are encouraged to go to each Early Course Check-In item in this document and reflect on the extent to which they are using the ideas and suggestions presented.

Visit Teaching & Learning's [Faculty Learning Hub](#) for more information.

Contact us at teachingandlearning@conestogac.on.ca.



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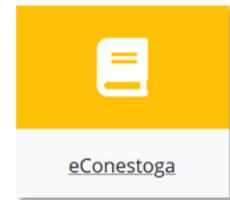
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Uses eConestoga as the main repository of all course-related instructions, content, resources, and grades



“I wish the dates were posted clearly on eConestoga and you didn’t have to dig for due dates or even email your teacher to find the dates because they aren’t posted anywhere.”
– Conestoga Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey

Every resource we use to teach needs to be posted on eConestoga and organized in a consistently predictable way that makes it easy for students to navigate, find what they are looking for, and access on their devices. Effective use of the learning management system (LMS, in our case, eConestoga) is one of the most important considerations in supporting student success in virtual environments (Chow, Tse & Armatas, 2018; Moreno, Cavazotte, & Alves, 2016). Using eConestoga in a structured and well-organized way will contribute to the overall success of your learners in your course.

Ways to use eConestoga effectively:

- Inform your students that they can **choose to be notified** when you add course content (click on their name in the top right corner, choose Notifications, and make sure that the Content item created is selected).
- Create a weekly **module** that includes all the learning resources associated with a particular topic and/or lesson.
- **Create and post a roadmap** for each module of what is going to be covered, how it will connect with previous learning, and what it will do for them as emerging professionals in their industry.
- Provide a **suggested work plan/learning path** for students that describes how it is best to use the lesson’s resources (the order, how long it should take, when it should be completed, etc.).
- Use a **standard module format** to organize the resources so that each module looks similar.
- Post any presentation slides or pre-recorded lessons at least **three days** before your scheduled synchronous class.
- Where possible, post a **recording of all synchronous classes**.
- Include **links to external and supplementary resources** that could help students learn the concepts.

Further Resources

[eConestoga Home](#) (Virtual Drop-In hours, Faculty Support tab for self-directed resources, etc.)
[Conestoga OLC Youtube Channel](#) (Video tutorials)

Provides relevant and useful learning resources to support my learning



Students consistently say that one of the key factors to their success in online environments is having access to a variety of meaningful learning resources (Martin, Ritzhaupt, Kumar, & Budhrani, 2019). Intentionally planning ways to convey the course information in multiple ways means knowing your learners, the context of the career they are embarking on, and the materials that are most engaging and meaningful for students. Meaningful resources may include multimedia sources (videos, real-world simulations), short articles, infographics, practice quizzes, images, or other industry-related materials intentionally selected by the professor to enrich the learning experience.

The role of the post-secondary educator is continuously evolving. We are not only subject-matter experts but also curators of learning paths and accessible options. Our job as facilitators of learning is to be “guiding students to find, analyze, evaluate, and apply information relevant to a particular subject domain” (Teachonline.ca, 2017). Wherever possible, learning resources for remote learners should be short and directed to facilitate ‘just-in-time’ learning experiences and enhance the professor’s lessons. Course materials should always be accessible for barrier-free learning.

Ways to provide relevant and useful learning resources:

- Reach out to your [library liaison](#) who can help you find resources such as videos and images that support your course.
- Think about **different ways** that students could learn about the topic. Ask yourself, does it have to be a lecture and an assignment, or could it be an authentic, discipline-specific problem for which the students have the necessary resources to seek out a solution?
- **Chunk your lessons** by mixing and matching different types of resources that together provide a comprehensive look at the topic.
- Make sure **all resources are accessible** (closed captioned videos, documents and slides checked to ensure they are accessible, images with alternate text, etc.).
- It’s also possible that students aren’t recognizing or tapping into the usefulness of the resources. Ask yourself, how can you frame the value of these resources for learner success, future employment, etc.?

Further Resources

[The Faculty Learning Hub – Library Services Category](#)

Provides clear instructions and expectations for all tests, assignments, and projects



Creating a structured, guided learning experience that supports all students requires clearly outlining the instructions for each assignment or project. Instructions that students find most useful are clear, concise, and direct in how they anticipate and respond to questions that students might have (Liem & Martin, 2013). To aid understanding, instructions should be described sequentially and, when applicable, include additional aids such as visuals or examples.

Whenever possible, model how you expect the activity or assignment to be completed before it is due. Avoid sharing additional materials needed for projects until you are sure students understand what is expected of them, since their attention will be focused on the assignment instructions (Sowell, 2017).

Ways to provide clear instructions and expectations:

- Post a **clear, written description** of every task you expect students to do.
- Ensure your **instructions** guide the student sequentially through the expected activity.
- Specify the **expected format** and **length of time** it should take students to complete.
- Provide a **template and/or model** of what an assignment should look like. Students may follow the model quite closely, but this is a natural way of developing post-secondary and discipline-specific competencies.
- Post a **rubric or marking scheme** that lets students know how the assessment will be evaluated. Review during a synchronous class or on an online discussion board by evaluating the model using the rubric.
- Try following the instructions yourself. Did you make any assumptions, or do the steps provide enough information for the students follow the instructions to complete the task successfully?
- Ensure students are informed ahead of time about all **test-related rules**.
- Ensure **formal assessments** include clear instructions, such as allotted time, allowable resources (calculators, notes, textbook, etc.), and any specific information your students need to know.

Further Resources

[Conestoga Faculty Orientation Handbook – Assessment section](#)

Includes a variety of activities that help me learn (e.g., virtual classes, discussions, group work, interactive apps)



“The interactive classes that allow for class discussion (teacher poses questions, makes break out rooms, or uses case studies to discuss) keeps me engaged during lecture and helps me grapple with the content. I wish all classes did this.”

– Conestoga Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey

Learning takes place in a class where students are meaningfully engaged. Engagement comes when students see value in an activity and believe they will somehow benefit by doing it (Schlechty, 2011). Incorporating a variety of active learning strategies into your classes has been proven to enhance students’ engagement and retention, and improve their learning (Freeman, et.al., 2014).

Ways to bring active learning into your classroom:

- Identify what activities will best help students achieve the specified learning outcomes. Explain to students **why engaging in these activities** will be helpful to their growth and skills acquisition in your industry.
- Avoid lecturing for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time. Strive to pause and engage students in active learning activities that help them to understand, explain, or apply the ideas you have just taught.
- Use the **model, scaffold, practice framework** to show students how to do something, work through an example with them, and then allow them to try it on their own.
- Choose meaningful activities that **deepen students’ understanding** of new concepts and instill a sense of **competence**.
- Provide students with **choice** in the task, how they choose to demonstrate mastery, when they do something, and/or who they choose to work with.
- Incorporate **formative assessment techniques** like polls, minute papers, exit tickets, and misconception checks to check for student understanding.
- Use **collaborative learning** to help students support each other as they learn new knowledge and skills.
- Use the **4S method** (Significant, Same, Specific, Simultaneous) with groups so that each is responsible for working on the same significant problem, are required to provide (and defend) a specific answer or choice at the end of the assigned time, and simultaneously report their solution.

Further Resources

[Faculty Learning Hub—Active Learning Workshop](#)

[BOPPPS Remote Lesson Planning Template \(download\)](#)

Responds to my messages and questions in a timely manner



“Faculty should reply the emails on time. Some are even never reply to email. You have to send 5 to 6 mails to get one reply.”

– Conestoga Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey

High engagement teaching strategies are essential to develop in order to create a positive remote learning environment for students (Nortvig, Peterson & Baille, 2018; Rios, Elliott & Manderach, 2018; Wilson & Stacey, 2004). Research shows that students who believe they are part of a **caring and responsive learning community** are more engaged and motivated to do well in their studies (Avery & Brett, 2020).

Part of our responsibilities as educators is to create a learning space in which our students feel comfortable putting forth their questions and confident in knowing their questions will be acknowledged and answered in a timely fashion. Ignoring a student with their hand up to ask a question would be unthinkable in a classroom context. Ignoring a student who is trying to connect by failing to respond to email is just as damaging to the teacher/learner relationship, and may negatively impact their engagement with your course.

Ways to respond to your students:

- [College procedure](#) specifies that “e-mail should be checked daily and responded to **within two business days or less**”. Concerns about marks must be addressed within five business days.
- Make your messages are always **clear, professional, and courteous** when answering student questions or concerns.
- Consider creating an “Administrivia” or “**FAQ**” **discussion section** in your eConestoga shell when you receive the same question several times. If you have been asked by one student, it’s very likely that others are wondering the same thing. Advise students to check the FAQ discussion board any time they have a question in case it has already been answered. After posting something new in the FAQ, send out a message to all students advising them it is there. For instance, you might say something like, “Some of you were asking about this aspect of the assignment. I’ve posted a short note to clarify in the FAQ section. Please be in touch if you have further questions.”

Further Resources

[Email templates – Students Struggling with Attendance and Engagement \(download\)](#)

Provides me with helpful feedback on my progress in this course



“It was difficult to receive feedback on assignments in some of the courses because we were only assigned a grade. I found it helpful when our work was returned to us and we could ask the professor - or the feedback was actually provided - where we could improve.”

– Conestoga Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey

Professors sometimes are baffled by students’ complaints that they are not giving helpful feedback. From the professor’s perspective, they may have taken the time to give feedback on each assignment to students. The issue here is perhaps not that the professor failed to provide feedback, but **rather that the student perceives it has not been valuable to the learning experience.**

Student perceptions that they are not being provided with meaningful feedback tends to fall into a few specific areas: (a) No comments are offered from the professor aside from a grade; (b) Feedback is not given in time to make an impact on learning and skill development; (c) Feedback isn’t useful; and (d) The feedback seems to have little to do with the grading criteria (Poulos & Mahoney, 2008). Effective feedback is ongoing: formative feedback about the student’s learning process throughout the course, and summative feedback that evaluates how the student met the learning outcomes (Paulson Gjerde, Padgett & Skinner, 2017; Schwarcz & Fargaris, 2017).

Ways to provide useful feedback to your students:

- **Check** for understanding frequently **and adjust** your teaching when there are knowledge gaps. Don’t assume students already understand essential background knowledge; use informal methods such as polling to find out what they do know.
- Provide **ongoing formative feedback** so students can adjust from and learn from their mistakes in process and understanding.
- Be **explicit**. Students get frustrated with comments like “Good work!” without clear expression about what you appreciated about the work.
- Try to grade and return assessments within **one week**.
- Make sure students know what they’ve done well and where they’ve made mistakes. **Rubrics and marking schemes** can help make this easier for both you and the students.
- Offer suggestions on **how students can improve** their work. Provide audio feedback (an option in eConestoga) if you don’t think students are reading your comments.
- Provide students with an **opportunity to review and discuss** their evaluated materials
- **Review assessments** with students when you return them. Identify the common errors and explain why they are incorrect.
- Use the **Grades feature in eConestoga** to provide easy access and timely feedback on graded work.

Further Resources

[Delivering Feedback Remotely Video Workshop](#)

Treats me with respect



“I feel like there could be more communication between our teachers and my peers. We need time available to communicate as if we were in class to make those connections and have discussions about course material.”

– Conestoga Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey

The type of climate we promote in our classes has a great deal to do with the learning outcomes we can help facilitate. **Students learn best from instructors they believe have their best interests as learners in mind.**

The learning climate reflects the values, norms, and goals of a class, which shape every aspect of teaching and learning. In your course. Climate has four dimensions: the *academic climate* (expectation of rigour, quality of teaching and course material), the *learning community climate* (interpersonal relationships between learners and teachers), the *climate of school safety* (physical and emotional security, including fairness and consistency), and the *institutional climate* (how the structures and organizational frameworks of a school support the members of the school community) (Wang & Degol, 2015). Student resilience and motivation are deeply connected to a feeling of belonging and students’ perception that faculty care about their success and well being (Furrer, Skinner & Pitzer, 2014).

Ways to show students you respect them and care about their success:

- Learn their **names** and how to pronounce them, informing yourself about their cultural and social contexts.
- Respect student **preferred gender pronouns**.
- **Get to know students** by asking about their experiences and backgrounds.
- Be caring, supportive, and flexible when students present you with difficult and unexpected situations.
- **Acknowledge their struggles and challenges**, perhaps by describing situations in which you found things difficult when you were learning the same materials.
- **Ask for feedback**, expressly telling students that their success and well being matters to you.
- **Praise collective good work**. Tell them what made you excited and proud about the most recent assignments they did.
- Be **humble, empathetic, and compassionate**.
- Express **belief in students’ capacity** to develop and learn with time, persistence, and hard work.
- **Don’t make assumptions** that the best way for your students to learn or connect are the ways that were best for you as a learner. Ask them what they need and try to adapt your teaching to their needs.

Further Resources

[Faculty Learning Hub – Building Community Category](#)

Grades and returns student work within a reasonable time



Conestoga's [Evaluation of Student Learning](#) policy states that faculty must “**Evaluate student work promptly, fairly, and consistently.**”

Ways to support your students with prompt, respectful grades and feedback:

- Let your students know that all submitted work will be graded and returned (or available for review) within a **specific time frame**, normally one week.
- Try to grade and return assessments within **one week**, or at least before the next assignment is due. This is particularly important if the next assignment depends on any skills or knowledge developed during completion of the current one.
- **Inform students** if you are unable to get graded assessments back within the expected time frame. Let them know when you expect to return them.
- Set aside sufficient **blocks of time to mark** student work.
- **Be systematic** in the way you mark. Grade one question for all students before moving to the next question. This ensures you are more consistent in your grading.
- Explore some of the [digital assessment tools](#) that Conestoga has available to organize and expedite your grading practices.

Further Resources

[Faculty Learning Hub – Assessing Learning Category](#)

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