Early Course Check-in: Taking Action

Winter 2022 Edition

The Early Course Check-In is a short version of the full Student Appraisal of Teaching (SAT) for. Early Course Check-In feedback enables you to gain insight into students' experiences and make any adjustments for the remainder of the course.

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 in their courses.

Visit the [Faculty Learning Hub](#) for more information, or contact Teaching & Learning:

Email – teachingandlearning@conestogac.on.ca
Twitter - @TLConestoga
Youtube - Teaching and Learning Conestoga
Phone - (519) 748-5220 ext. 2535

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." – Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey*

Every resource we use to teach should 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 the students in your course.

Note that this Early Course Check-in item will not appear for asynchronous courses only.

Ways to use eConestoga effectively:

- Try to imagine your eConestoga shell and first few weeks from a student's point of view.
- Use tools such as the Essential Elements Scanner and Dynamic Instructional plan to ensure key information is available to students.
- Use a weekly module system that includes all the learning resources associated with a topic or lesson, and keep a standard format to organize the resources so each module looks similar.
- Inform your students that they can choose to be notified when you add course content (select this link for video instructions: Activity Feed - Customize Notifications [1:29]).
- 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/checklist that describes how best to use the lesson's resources (the order, how long it should take, when it should be completed, etc.).
- Post any presentation slides or pre-recorded lessons at least three days before your scheduled synchronous class.
- Where possible, post a recording of synchronous online classes.
- Include links to supplementary resources that could help students learn course concepts.
- Make assignment and test due dates clearly marked in your course resources.

Questions to consider:

- Have you ensured all Essential Elements are available in your course shell three days before the course start date?
- Does the Instructional Plan outline activities, dates, assessments and suggested resources for each week or unit?

- Does your welcome message or video help students feel safe with you and anticipate the course?
- Are students easily able to identify the times and links for synchronous classes and office hours/additional support?
- Do they know the best way to ask questions (e.g., in class, after class, in a discussion board, in a drop-in time)?
- Have you explained when you will return marked work?
- Have you walked students through the course shell and any text or e-text highlighting expectations?
- Have you asked students if there is anything they are missing that would help them navigate the course?
- Do you provide an agenda or overview at the start of each synchronous session?

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).*

To provide relevant and useful learning resources, you must know your learners, the context of the career they are embarking on, and the materials that are most engaging and meaningful for them. 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, n.p.).

Wherever possible, learning resources for 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 team 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 describe the value of these resources for learner success, future employment, etc.?
- Distinguish how the learning resources apply to the concepts, lessons, and assignments.
- Try reading a section of the learning resource together as a class.

Questions to consider:

- Have you added meaningful resources to your eConestoga shell including both text and multimedia sources (e.g., videos, real-world simulations, H5P interactives, short articles, infographics, practice quizzes, images, or industry-related materials)?
- Have you highlighted to students the value of the materials you have curated in eConestoga?
- Have you used these resources in the synchronous sessions or in asynchronous activities to showcase their value?
- Have you indicated how the resources will help them succeed and get marks on assessments?

Further Resources
- [Faculty Learning Hub – Library Services Category](#)
- [Faculty Learning Hub - Videos Category](#)
- [Faculty Learning Hub - Visuals and Images Category](#)

Includes a variety of activities that help me learn (e.g., checklists, 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." – Student, Spring 2020 COVID-19 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 minutes** at a time. Strive to pause and engage students to 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.

Questions to consider:

- Have you paced your lesson to include regular opportunities for active learning?
- Have you chosen activities which will be meaningful to the students in the class?
- Have you included the "why" in your introduction to each activity?
- Have you considered the complexity of each activity and ordered the lesson to scaffold for success?
- Have you provided clear instructions and modelling as needed for each activity?
- Have you included elements of choice?

- Is the goal for each activity clear and achievable?

Further Resources

- Faculty Learning Hub - Active Learning Category See a list with over 2 dozen activities, with links to more information on how to implement in class.
- BOPPPPS Lesson Planning Template (PDF download)

Facilitates opportunities for me to ask questions through supportive invitations and responses

"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." – Student, Spring 2020 COVID-19 Student Feedback Survey

High engagement teaching strategies are essential to develop in order to create a positive 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 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 clear and 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:

In-person/Synchronous Online

- Pause for 10 to 20 seconds to allow students to form questions for you in class.
- Give students multiple opportunities to ask questions at different times during class.
- Confirm that you understand the question before giving a response.
- If in-person, ask students to write questions on pieces of paper, then give them to you to answer later in class or in the next class or by email.
- If synchronous online, pause the recording or invite students to share questions in private chat.

Hybrid/Asynchronous

- [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.
- Remember that eConestoga announcements are not sent to email prior to "notifications set up." Try sending both announcements and emails to ensure the class receives your messages.
- Ensure your emails are **clear, professional, and courteous** when answering student questions or concerns. Offer to meet with the student if they are still not clear.
- Create an **"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."

- If you find that student emails or messages are informal or unclear, think through any initial negative emotional response you might have. Then, explain to the class how emails can be written for clarity and professionalism.

Questions to consider:

- Do you provide opportunities to ask questions?
- Do you rephrase the question to ensure that you have understood what the student is asking?
- Are your responses supportive of the student?
- Have you explained the 2-day email response policy to your students?
- Are you responding to emails within that time frame?
- Do you ensure that your email responses are clear, professional, and courteous?
- Do you offer to meet with students if they wish?

Further Resources

- Hidden Communication Challenges (Faculty Learning Hub)
- Email templates – Students Struggling with Attendance and Engagement (Word download)
- The Spectrum of Effective Questioning (PDF download)
- 29 Critical Thinking Question Stems for Any Content Area (PDF download)

Manages student behaviour and interactions in a manner that makes it comfortable for me to learn

> *The academic success of a diverse student body begins with a sense of inclusion and security. Students who feel welcome and safe in their classes will be one crucial step closer to the kind of engagement needed for successful learning (Cox & Strange, 2016, p. 216).*

Every student at Conestoga has the right to learn and be informed in a safe environment, and the responsibility to "respect the well-being and the personal worth and dignity of all" and "actively contribute to a positive learning and working environment" ([Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)).

One of the best ways to promote respectful behaviour and a positive classroom environment is to cultivate a positive relationship with learners, one based on mutual respect. Another way to manage interactions in the classroom so that all students feel comfortable is to identify and target appropriate and desired behaviours, and positively reinforce those behaviours. Finally, it is also a good idea to anticipate and proactively address disruptive behaviour using a progressive intervention strategy. This involves first understanding the potential sources the of behaviour and the actual (vs perceived) level of disruption caused to the class.

Ways to manage student behaviour to promote positive interactions and comfort in class:

- Use students' names, make small talk in advance of the class, and comment positively on responses and behaviours that are appropriate to the classroom.
- Use clear and simple rules and expectations which are consistently and fairly applied.
- Provide a predictable classroom routine, with information about upcoming transitions and changes.
- Increase engagement in activities by giving students multiple or innovative ways to interact, give students choice and access to preferred activities.
- Build rapport and trust among students through ice breaking and trust-building activities.
- Use class guidelines to encourage desirable behaviour. You may wish to refer to the college-wide guidelines, [Student Expectations for Online Engagement](#). Or co-create guidelines for class conduct to promote a shared understanding of expectations for conduct. Keep the co-created guidelines available for the class to review.
- If you notice behaviours that may make the class uncomfortable for other learners, remind the class as a whole about the classroom guidelines. If behaviours persist, meet with the student privately, inquiring about what behaviours you have noticed and what the consequences might be if those behaviours continue.
- During stressful times (e.g., midterms, exams) remind students of [Student Health & Wellness](#) resources and support through a [Student Success Advisor](#)

Questions to consider:

- Have you suggested or co-created ground rules for how your classes will run?
- Have you told the students how you will protect and honour their privacy and confidentiality?
- Have you explained what you will do if someone is behaving inappropriately or harmfully?
- Have you vetted your own speech for inappropriate humour, compliments, commentary, and language use?
- Is your setting on Zoom or Teams professional and well lit? Are you modeling professional hygiene and dress appropriate for the classroom?
- Do you give both oral and written instructions, timing and deliverables for any breakout room activities?
- Do you respond to any student concerns or complaints in a sympathetic manner, trying to identify their interests rather than getting stuck on positioning?
- Are you invitational when you ask for comments and questions providing enough of a pause for students to gather their thoughts?

Further Resources
- Creating Class Guidelines with Students (Faculty Learning Hub)
- Creating a Positive Learning Environment in Zoom (Faculty Learning Hub)
- Managing Communication in Online Synchronous Classes (Faculty Learning Hub)
- Best Practices for Faculty to Support Students in Distress or in Crisis (Faculty Learning Hub)

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

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).

Creating a structured, guided learning experience that supports all students requires clearly outlining the instructions for each assignment or project. 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.
- 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.
- 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 class or on a 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 time, allowable resources (calculators, notes, textbook, etc.), and any specific information your students need to know.
- Give tips, such as looking over the whole test to plan their time, and well wishes for success!

Questions to consider:
- Have you posted assignment and/or test descriptions in eConestoga well in advance of the due date?
- Have you posted a rubric and/or marking scheme for each item?
- Do your instructions guide the students sequentially through the expectations?
- Have you gone over them in a synchronous session?
- Have students had a chance to ask questions about an upcoming assignment or test?
- Have you provided some formative practice and given feedback to the class?
- Have you done a think-aloud walk through of how you mark?

- Have you provided a model or example and described what mark it would receive and why?

Further Resources
- Creating Clarity in Assignment Descriptions (Faculty Learning Hub)
- Rubric Items and Riders (Faculty Learning Hub)
- See The Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment for resources related to writing assignment descriptions and processes for a variety of assignment types including capstones.

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."* – Student, Spring 2020 COVID-19 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).

Conestoga's Evaluation of Student Learning Procedure states that faculty must "Evaluate student work promptly, fairly, and consistently."

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, 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.
- 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 the assessment tools that Conestoga has available to expedite your grading practices.
- 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 feedback that is easy to access.

Questions to consider:
- Have you provided a few forward-looking comments or questions to encourage reflection?
- Have you given explanatory information and concrete suggestions for further improvement?
- Have you labelled your suggestions as feedback?
- Have you limited yourself to what is helpful rather than providing a defense of your mark?
- Have you invited students to request a meeting if they have questions about a mark?
- Have you maintained an evidence-based, outcomes-based stance? Encourage students to share with you any evidence suggesting a different mark.

Further Resources
- [Providing Feedback in an Online Environment](#) (Faculty Learning Hub)
- [Delivering Feedback Remotely Video Workshop](#) (Faculty Learning Hub)
- [Supporting Marked Group Writing Assignments](#) (Faculty Learning Hub)
- [Creating a Rubric: Effective Practices](#) (Faculty Learning Hub)

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 coarse material." – Student, Spring 2020 COVID19 Student Feedback Survey*

The climate we promote in our classes has a great deal to do with the learning outcomes we can help facilitate. Students learn best when they believe their professor has their best interests 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 respect and care for 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 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.
- 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.
- 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 assume that the best way for your students to learn are those that were best for you as a learner. Ask them what they need and try to adapt your teaching to their needs.

Questions to consider:
- What strategies are you employing or could you try to learn student names?
- How have you incorporated opportunities to get to you know your students?
- Do you have a communication strategy to let students know what to expect regarding assignments, feedback, and communication?
- Have you provided positive feedback to the class?
- Have you asked students for their feedback?
- In what ways do you express encouragement to your students?

Further Resources

- o [Faculty Learning Hub - Building Community Category](#)
- o [Students from India - Effective Communication Strategies](#) (Faculty Learning Hub)
- o [Accommodating and Supporting Students with Disabilities](#) (Conestoga Faculty Stories)

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