

# SREB

*Educational Technology  
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# Standards for Quality Online Teaching

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# Standards for Quality Online Teaching

*“Each student needs a quality teacher. That means someone who knows how to teach — and can show it. It also means someone who knows the subject matter well — and can prove it. Most of all, it means someone who is successful in raising student achievement.”*

*Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead, Southern Regional Education Board, 2002*

## Introduction

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The most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Everyone understands, on a personal level, the importance of teachers to their educational success. Teachers who know their subject, understand how to teach and can adjust their teaching to student needs will be successful in raising student achievement, research shows. Teacher expectations also are a significant factor in how much and how well students learn.

Online learning provides the opportunity for every middle grades and high school student, regardless of where he or she lives or attends school, to have access to a quality teacher. Many of these students benefit by being challenged academically by an online teacher who, in some cases, possesses stronger academic credentials and essential teaching skills than traditional classroom staff, especially in certain geographic and subject-shortage areas. Access to quality online teaching can result in improved student academic performance and increased course completion rates.

Quality online teaching reflects the attributes of any effective teaching, whether in the traditional classroom or online. Both traditional classroom teachers and online teachers need to know their subjects and how to teach them. They also must know their students, stay up to date in their subject areas, and manage and monitor students' academic progress to ensure success.

But in the 10 years since Web-based courses were first made available to students, the understanding of what is required to be a successful online teacher has increased significantly. The technology used to access and provide Web-based courses effectively also has improved. Now it is important to re-examine what qualifications are needed to be an effective online teacher.

Equally important is an understanding of the attributes of today's students, who have access to and can use technology to pursue opportunities and information never before available to them. For many students, this access has changed the way they see the world and the way they work and play. Consideration of these student issues is critical for a teacher to be effective.

Another often overlooked but important issue for online teachers: Delivery of Web-based courses is not restricted to a specific time or schedule. Because instruction does not start and stop at the same time for all students, time-management skills are extremely important, not only for the online teacher but also for students. The lack of these skills is a major reason why some students drop their online courses.

Effective online teachers also must possess the ability to prepare quality written communications. Appropriate and effective writing not only conveys information — it encourages and supports students. Words and body language that traditional classroom teachers use must be translated to the online environment for online teachers to be successful.

All of these issues must be factored into setting appropriate standards for quality online teaching.

## The Standards

The standards for quality online teaching in this report were developed by knowledgeable, experienced resource persons from K-12 and postsecondary education, drawn from national and regional organizations, SREB state departments of education, and colleges and universities. Through extensive collaboration and sharing with SREB staff over many months, their work culminated in specific standards that SREB states can use to define and implement quality online teaching. Through broad acceptance of these standards, SREB states will be able to provide more students with the courses they need, regardless of where students and teachers reside.

These standards have been supported by practice over time, as well as substantiated by research. In fact, research at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels is creating a growing body of evidence that quality online teaching is not only as good as traditional teaching — in many ways it can be superior.

## Academic Preparation

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- **Standard:** *The teacher meets the professional teaching standards established by a state-licensing agency or the teacher has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching.*

### Indicators

The teacher:

- meets the state's professional teaching standards or has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching;
- provides evidence that he or she has credentials in the field of study to be taught;
- knows the content of the subject to be taught and understands how to teach the content to students;
- facilitates the construction of knowledge through an understanding of how students learn in specific subject areas; and
- continues to update academic knowledge and skills.

## Content Knowledge, Skills and Temperament for Instructional Technology ---

- **Standard:** *The teacher has the prerequisite technology skills to teach online.*

### Indicators

The teacher:

- demonstrates the ability to effectively use word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation software;
- demonstrates effective use of Internet browsers, e-mail applications and appropriate online etiquette;
- demonstrates the ability to modify and add content and assessment, using an online Learning Management System (LMS);
- incorporates multimedia and visual resources into an online module;
- utilizes synchronous and asynchronous tools (e.g., discussion boards, chat tools, electronic whiteboards) effectively;
- troubleshoots typical software and hardware problems;
- demonstrates the ability to effectively use and incorporate subject-specific and developmentally appropriate software in an online learning module; and
- demonstrates growth in technology knowledge and skills in order to stay current with emerging technologies.

# Online Teaching and Learning Methodology, Management, Knowledge, Skills and Delivery

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- **Standard:** *The teacher plans, designs and incorporates strategies to encourage active learning, interaction, participation and collaboration in the online environment.*

## Indicators

The teacher:

- demonstrates effective strategies and techniques that actively engage students in the learning process (e.g., team problem-solving, in-class writing, analysis, synthesis and evaluation instead of passive lectures);
- facilitates and monitors appropriate interaction among students;
- builds and maintains a community of learners by creating a relationship of trust, demonstrating effective facilitation skills, establishing consistent and reliable expectations, and supporting and encouraging independence and creativity;
- promotes learning through group interaction;
- leads online instruction groups that are goal-oriented, focused, project-based and inquiry-oriented;
- demonstrates knowledge and responds appropriately to the cultural background and learning needs of non-native English speakers;
- differentiates instruction based on students' learning styles and needs and assists students in assimilating information to gain understanding and knowledge; and
- demonstrates growth in teaching strategies in order to benefit from current research and practice.

- **Standard:** *The teacher provides online leadership in a manner that promotes student success through regular feedback, prompt response and clear expectations.*

## Indicators

The teacher:

- consistently models effective communication skills and maintains records of applicable communications with students;
- encourages interaction and cooperation among students, encourages active learning, provides prompt feedback, communicates high expectations, and respects diverse talents and learning styles;
- persists, in a consistent and reasonable manner, until students are successful;

- establishes and maintains ongoing and frequent teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction and teacher-parent interaction;
  - provides an online syllabus that details the terms of class interaction for both teacher and students, defines clear expectations for both teacher and students, defines the grading criteria, establishes inappropriate behavior criteria for both teacher and students, and explains the course organization to students;
  - provides a syllabus with objectives, concepts and learning outcomes in a clearly written, concise format;
  - uses student data to inform instruction, guides and monitors students' management of their time, monitors learner progress with available tools and develops an intervention plan for unsuccessful learners;
  - provides timely, constructive feedback to students about assignments and questions; and
  - gives students clear expectations about teacher response time.
- **Standard:** *The teacher models, guides and encourages legal, ethical, safe and healthy behavior related to technology use.*

#### **Indicators**

The teacher:

- facilitates student investigations of the legal and ethical issues related to technology and society;
- establishes standards for student behavior that are designed to ensure academic integrity and appropriate uses of the Internet and written communication;
- identifies the risks of academic dishonesty for students;
- demonstrates an awareness of how the use of technology may impact student testing performance;
- uses course content that complies with intellectual property rights policies and fair use standards;
- provides students with an understanding of the importance of Acceptable Use Policies (AUP);
- demonstrates knowledge of resources and techniques for dealing with issues arising from inappropriate use of electronically accessed data or information; and
- informs students of their right to privacy and the conditions under which their names or online submissions may be shared with others.

- **Standard:** *The teacher has experienced online learning from the perspective of a student.*

#### **Indicators**

The teacher:

- applies experiences as an online student to develop and implement successful strategies for online teaching;
- demonstrates the ability to anticipate challenges and problems in the online classroom; and
- demonstrates an understanding of the perspective of the online student through appropriate responsiveness and a supportive attitude toward students.

- **Standard:** *The teacher understands and is responsive to students with special needs in the online classroom.*

#### **Indicators**

The teacher:

- understands that students have varied talents and skills and uses appropriate strategies designed to include all students;
- provides activities, modified as necessary, that are relevant to the needs of all students;
- adapts and adjusts instruction to create multiple paths to learning objectives;
- encourages collaboration and interaction among all students;
- exhibits the ability to assess student knowledge and instruction in a variety of ways; and
- provides student-centered lessons and activities that are based on concepts of active learning and that are connected to real-world applications.

- **Standard:** *The teacher demonstrates competencies in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that assure validity and reliability of instruments and procedures.*

#### **Indicators**

The teacher:

- creates or selects fair, adequate and appropriate assessment instruments to measure online learning that reflect sufficient content validity (i.e., that adequately cover the content they are designed to measure), reliability and consistency over time; and
- implements online assessment measures and materials in ways that ensure instrument validity and reliability.

- **Standard:** *The teacher develops and delivers assessments, projects and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assesses learning progress by measuring student achievement of learning goals.*

#### Indicators

The teacher:

- continually reviews all materials and Web resources for their alignment with course objectives and state and local standards and for their appropriateness;
  - creates assignments, projects and assessments that are aligned with students' different visual, auditory and hands-on ways of learning;
  - includes authentic assessment (i.e., the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of acquired knowledge and skills as opposed to testing isolated skills or retained facts) as part of the evaluation process;
  - provides continuous evaluation of students to include pre- and post-testing and student input throughout the course; and
  - demonstrates an understanding of the relationships between and among the assignments, assessments and standards-based learning goals.
- **Standard:** *The teacher demonstrates competencies in using data and findings from assessments and other data sources to modify instructional methods and content and to guide student learning.*

#### Indicators

The teacher:

- assesses each student's background and content knowledge and uses these data to plan instruction;
  - reviews student responses to test items to identify issues related to test validity or instructional effectiveness;
  - uses observational data (e.g., tracking data in electronic courses, Web logs, e-mail) to monitor course progress and effectiveness; and
  - creates opportunities for self-reflection or assessment of teaching effectiveness within the online environment (e.g., classroom assessment techniques, teacher evaluations, teacher peer reviews).
- **Standard:** *The teacher demonstrates frequent and effective strategies that enable both teacher and students to complete self- and pre-assessments.*

#### Indicators

The teacher:

- employs ways to assess student readiness for course content and method of delivery;

- employs ways for students to effectively evaluate and assess their own readiness for course content and method of delivery;
- understands that student success (e.g., grade, level of participation, mastery of content, completion percentage) is an important measure of teaching and course success; and
- provides opportunities for student self-assessment within courses.

## Additional Resources\*

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ALN Web Center. “Web Center: Learning Networks Effectiveness Research” — <http://www.alnresearch.org/index.jsp>.

This Alfred P. Sloan Foundation-funded Web site contains online learning research resources from postsecondary institutions. It is free, but users must sign up for a user identity.

Blomeyer, Robert L., Ph.D. *Professional Development for Effective Teaching and Online Learning*. Virtual School Report, Connections Academy, 2006 — <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/pdfs/VirtualNewsSpring2006.pdf>.

This is a summary version of the K-12 online learning research that the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) sponsored in 2005.

Cavanaugh, Cathy, Kathy Jo Gillian, Jeff Kromrey, Melinda Hess and Robert Blomeyer. *The Effects of Distance Education on K-12 Student Outcomes: A Meta-analysis*. Learning Point Associates, October 2004 — <http://www.ncrel.org/tech/distance/k12distance.pdf>.

This meta-analysis is a statistical review of 116 effect sizes from 14 Web-delivered, K-12 distance education programs studied between 1999 and 2004. The analysis shows that distance education can have the same effect on measures of student academic achievement when compared with traditional instruction.

O’Neil, Harold F. *What Works in Distance Learning?* University of Southern California/CRESST, February 2003 — [www.adlnet.gov/downloads/124.cfm](http://www.adlnet.gov/downloads/124.cfm).

“The purpose of this report is to document the progress to date in what works in distance learning (DL). An overriding goal of this effort is to create a robust and clear set of design guidelines to support the next generation of DL training. There are five critical dimensions of the DL system we propose to support with guideline

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\* Adapted from information provided by Robert L. Blomeyer Ph.D., senior program associate, Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (MREL)

references: management strategies, learner characteristics (including individual differences, learning and motivational strategies), instructional strategies, multimedia strategies, and assessment strategies.” — Excerpt

Smith, Rosina, Tom Clark and Robert L. Blomeyer. *A Synthesis of New Research K-12 Online Learning*. Learning Point Associates, November 2005 — <http://www.ncrel.org/tech/synthesis/synthesis.pdf>.

This report summarizes eight research studies on online learning and presents implications for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners based on the studies.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. *Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community*. March 2006 — <http://www.itcnetwork.org/Accreditation-EvidenceofQualityinDEPrograms.pdf>.

This report is in response to the GAO Report to Congressional Requesters on Distance Education (GAO-04-279). The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Education “(1) develop, with the help of accrediting agencies and schools, guidelines or a mutual understanding that would lead to more consistent and thorough assessment of distance education programs, including developing evaluative components for holding schools accountable for such outcomes and (2) if necessary, request authority from the Congress to require that accrediting agencies use these guidelines in their accreditation efforts.”

“What Works in Distance Learning?” — <http://fusion.jointadlcolab.org/wwindl/>.

“What Works in Distance Learning” is a collection of findings in the effectiveness of design and development strategies for Distance Learning (DL). Supported by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) Capable Manpower Future Naval Capability (CM FNC), these guidelines were compiled by Dr. Harry O’Neil of the University of Southern California and the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST)/UCLA. This Web site is the companion to the article written by Harold F. O’Neil that is cited above.

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