

# A Peer Review Guide for Face-to-Face and Hybrid Courses at Penn State

## Background

In 1987, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson published “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” a summary of 50 years of higher education research that addressed good teaching and learning practices. Their findings, and faculty and institutional evaluation instruments based on the findings, have been widely used to guide and improve college teaching.

### The Seven Principles conclude that good practice:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty;
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students;
3. Encourages active learning;
4. Gives prompt feedback;
5. Emphasizes time on task;
6. Communicates high expectations; and
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin* (39) 7.

While course surveys such as the Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE) focus on students' satisfaction with their experience in a course, the Seven Principles provide a useful framework to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching and learning. Therefore, this *Peer Review Guide for Face-to-Face and Hybrid Courses* adapts the Seven Principles to facilitate the peer review of face-to-face and hybrid courses<sup>1</sup> in both undergraduate- and graduate-level online courses at Penn State. Each principle is described in detail, including evidence of how a principle may be met. Examples of evidence to look for and resources for additional information are also included.

While, ideally, good practice would suggest that all seven principles would be supported in some way in a face-to-face or hybrid course, variations in course format, size, and faculty teaching experience can make reaching that ideal difficult. Like the SRTE, where achieving an overall score of “7” is rare, it is assumed that a peer reviewer will discover room for improvement when examining a course through the lens of the Seven Principles. This Peer Review Guide provides space for the peer reviewer to note teaching and learning strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

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## <sup>1</sup> Introduction

At Penn State, the definition of Hybrid Courses is as follows: “Courses that combine Web and traditional face-to-face classroom instruction. Hybrid courses are organized to reduce or replace the number of required face-to-face class sessions in order to improve effectiveness and flexibility for instructors and students and/or to achieve other efficiencies. Hybrid courses reduce by approximately 40% or more of the number of required classroom sessions, although some classroom sessions are required.”

(See <http://weblearning.psu.edu/resources/glossary/>)

## Recommended Peer Review Process

Peer reviews of teaching are required for promotion and tenure at Penn State. University Policy HR23 states, “Each academic unit (e.g., department, college, and University Libraries) of the University should take responsibility for developing detailed review procedures, supplemental to and consonant with general University procedures, as guidelines for promotion and tenure.”

To help facilitate the peer review of hybrid courses, we recommend the following peer review process:

1. The department/division head or school director or, where appropriate, campus chancellor and campus director of academic affair, identifies a faculty peer (“peer reviewer”) to conduct the peer review of teaching.
2. The course instructor completes the *Instructor Input Form* and meets with the reviewer to share that document and to convey additional contextual information about the course.
3. The peer reviewer uses the *Peer Review Guide for Hybrid Courses* to review the teaching of the course, both online and in the face-to-face classroom. The reviewer will be observing how well the instructor addresses each of the Seven Principles. The reviewer notes the instructor's strengths and areas for improvement for each Principle in the space provided.

NOTE: Reviewers should feel free to ask questions of the instructor any time clarification or information is needed during the review process.

4. The peer reviewer summarizes the feedback in the form of a letter to that instructor that can be included in the instructor's dossier. The letter, as well as a copy of the completed *Peer Review Guide for Hybrid Courses*, is then shared with the instructor and the department/division head or school director or, where appropriate, campus chancellor and campus director of academic affairs.
5. The instructor consults appropriate professional development resources, including learning design professionals, to strengthen areas identified for improvement.

For **provisional faculty** (not yet tenured), it is recommended that peer reviews should occur at least once per year and in a variety of courses. Faculty being **reviewed for promotion**, it is better to have a series of peer reviews over time rather than several in the fall immediately preceding the review.

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### **PRINCIPLE 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty.**

Frequent and timely student-faculty contact is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement, particularly in a hybrid environment. Evidence of faculty concern helps students get through challenging situations and inspires them to persevere. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

**Examples of evidence to look for:** The instructor...

- Encourages and fosters a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among course participants.
- Holds regular office hours, and by appointment, either face-to-face or that are mediated by technology (e.g., the telephone, chat areas, Adobe Connect Pro) to accommodate distance students
- Encourages students to share their questions, examples, and experiences
- Accepts students' responses
- Treats students as individuals, e.g., addresses students by name
- Incorporates student ideas into the class
- Checks individual and/or groups of students' understanding of the material/approach

**Additional examples to look for in the *face-to-face* classroom:** The instructor...

- Uses gestures, movements, facial expressions and other physical responses that him/her more friendly and accessible
- Pauses after asking questions
- Attends respectfully to student comprehension or puzzlement
- Explores topics in detail with students (rather than skimming by many ideas)

**Additional examples to look for in the *online* environment:** The instructor...

- Provides a "welcome message" at the beginning of the course that encourages student-to-instructor contact
- Initiates contact with, or respond to, students on a regular basis in order to establish a consistent online presence in the course (and gives students prior notice in the event that the instructor will be unavailable for more than a few days)
- Uses a prominent announcement area to communicate important up-to-date course information to students, such as reminders of impending assignment due dates, curriculum changes, scheduled absences, etc.
- Responds to student inquiries in a timely manner
- Provides students with interaction space for study groups, "hall way conversations," etc.

Where to look online:

- Communication tools (discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)
- Posted announcements
- Course syllabus

**Resources:**

- "Managing Your Online Class" - <http://facdev.e-education.psu.edu/teach/manage>
- "Ice-breakers" - [http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2002\\_01/index.asp](http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2002_01/index.asp)
- "21<sup>st</sup> Century Icebreakers: 13 Ways To Get To Know Your Students With Technology" - <http://teachbytes.com/2012/08/05/21st-century-icebreakers-10-ways-to-get-to-know-your-students-with-technology/>
- ELI Discovery Tool: Blended Learning Workshop Guide: Building Community and Collaboration <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI80073.pdf>
- A cross-case analysis of how faculty connect learning in hybrid courses - <http://www.adulterc.org/Proceedings/2006/Proceedings/Skibba.pdf>

### **Feedback for the Instructor**

**Evidence Found:**

**Strengths:**

**Areas for Improvement:**



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### PRINCIPLE 3: Good practice encourages active learning.

Active learning methods engage students in the learning process by encouraging them to discover, process, and apply information. Empirical support for the positive impact of active learning on student achievement is extensive. (See Prince, M. (July 2004). Does active learning work? A review of the research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93, 3, 223-232.)

**Examples of evidence to look for:** The instructor...

- Challenges or engages student assumptions
- Demonstrates active listening
- Models thinking and problem-solving; works through problems, scenarios, arguments with students
- Assigns student activities that involve one or more of the following (see <http://senate.psu.edu/scca/curricular%20affairs%20reports/2-01%20CA%20RPT%202.pdf>):
  - active use of writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression
  - opportunity for information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems (including the use of library, electronic/computer and other resources, and quantitative reasoning and interpretation, as applicable)
  - engagement in collaborative learning activities
  - application of intercultural and international competence
  - dialogue pertaining to social behavior, community, and scholarly conduct
  - integrates three or more of the above activities into General Education courses offered in the knowledge domains (<http://www.psu.edu/ufs/geic/framework.html>)
  - thinking, talking, or writing about their learning
  - reflecting, relating, organizing, applying, synthesizing, or evaluating information
  - performing research, lab or studio work, or physical activities
  - participating in, designing, or developing educational games and simulations

Provides opportunities for students to “customize” assignments to their personal and professional interests and needs

Where to look online:

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials
- Assignment dropboxes
- e-Portfolios
- Communication tools (discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)

**Resources:**

- Active Learning (Illinois State University) - <http://cte.illinois.edu/resources/topics/methods/active.html>
- “Promoting Active Learning” - <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/learning-resources/promoting-active-learning>
- “Inquiry-based Learning” - <http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/IBL.pdf>
- Enhancing Student Learning and Retention with Blended Learning Class Guides - <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/EnhancingStudentLearningandRet/219137>
- Bringing Active Learning into a Hybrid Course - <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Bringing+active+learning+into+a+hybrid+course.-a0129973268>
- Hybrid Learning: Maximizing Student Engagement (*Campus Technology*) - [http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2007/05/Hybrid-Learning-Maximizing-Student-Engagement.aspx?sc\\_lang=en&Page=1](http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2007/05/Hybrid-Learning-Maximizing-Student-Engagement.aspx?sc_lang=en&Page=1)
- Move over Socrates: Online Discussion is Here - <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/NCP0330.pdf>

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### PRINCIPLE 4: Good practice gives prompt feedback.

Instructors help students frequently assess their knowledge and competence and provide them with opportunities to perform, receive meaningful suggestions, and reflect on their learning.

**Examples of evidence to look for:** The instructor...

- Includes information about course feedback methods and standards on the course syllabus.
- Provides an option (or requirement) for students to submit drafts of assignments for instructor feedback.
- Provides meaningful feedback on student assignments that is provided within a publicized, and reasonable, time frame.
- Provides assignment feedback that is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observable behavior that can be changed.
- Clearly communicates course and individual assignment grading criteria.
- Surveys students to elicit feedback for course improvement.
- Praises/acknowledges responses from the class.
- Helps students to extend their responses.
- Provides students with periodic feedback.
- Uses positive reinforcement.
- Asks student teams to read each others' homework and critique.
- Structures discussions of material based on feedback on students' understanding.

**Additional examples to look for in an online environment:** *The instructor...*

- Gives students access to an up-to-date course gradebook.
- Provides an open discussion forum where students can ask questions, and receive instructor feedback, about course content and activities.
- Shares examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals.
- Provides opportunities for practice with feedback such as interactive self assessments or narrated demonstrations of how to solve mathematical problems.

*Where to look online:*

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials / Assignment directions
- Assignment dropboxes and e-portfolios
- Course gradebook
- Discussion forums
- Survey instruments

**Additional examples to look for in the face-to-face classroom:** *The instructor...*

- Has students work problems on the board.
- Actively monitors group activities, e.g., asking questions, offering help).

**Resources:**

- "5 Research-based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback" - <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/tips-providing-students-meaningful-feedback-marianne-stenger>
- "Gives Prompt Feedback" - <https://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/innovate/principles/gives-4a.html>
- "A Better Blend" - [http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2010/07/01/A-Better-Blend.aspx?sc\\_lang=en&Page=1](http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2010/07/01/A-Better-Blend.aspx?sc_lang=en&Page=1)
- Howard E. Aldrich. 2002. "Your Paper's on the Floor, Outside My Door." *National Teaching & Learning Forum*, 12, 1: 10.

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### PRINCIPLE 5: Good education emphasizes time on task.

The frequency and duration of study, as well as effective time management skills, are critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning to manage and prioritize their study time.

**Examples of evidence to look for:** The instructor...

- Provides a course schedule that outlines topics to be covered and assignment due dates so students can plan their workload accordingly.
- Provides course-specific study tips that provide students with strategies for utilizing their time well.
- Provides assignment feedback that gives students with information on where to focus their studies.
- Considers the nature of the student audience when considering assignment due dates and timeframes, e.g., a course targeted to working adult professionals might incorporate a weekend into an assignment timeframe.
- Makes announcements to the class addressing upcoming assignments and exams.
- Provides explicit directions for active learning tasks, e.g., rationale, duration, product.
- Allows sufficient time to complete tasks, such as group work.

**Additional examples to look for in the online environment:** The instructor...

- Includes information on the course syllabus that provides an estimate of the amount of time students should spend on the course, e.g., "On average, most students spend eight hours per week working on course assignments. Your workload may be more or less depending on your prior experience with computing and the Web in general, and with this subject in particular."
- Gives time-to-completion information on course assignments, e.g., "This assignment should take you approximately 2 hours to complete."
- Shares course statistics that demonstrate that time-to-completion and weekly time-on-task estimates are on target.

Where to look online:

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials / Assignment directions
- Assignment dropboxes and e-portfolios
- Log in and other access data in the LMS

**Additional examples to look for in the face-to-face classroom:** The instructor models time on task and organization skills by:

- Arriving to class on time
- Providing an outline or organization for the class session
- Following the stated structure
- Completing the scheduled topics

**Resources:**

- "Online Course Design: Time on Task" - [https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/sites/rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/files/docs/Course%20Design\\_Online\\_Time%20%20on%20Task\\_v1.5.pdf](https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/sites/rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/files/docs/Course%20Design_Online_Time%20%20on%20Task_v1.5.pdf)
- iStudy Module (for students) on Time Management - <http://tutorials.istudy.psu.edu/timemanagement/>
- How Students Develop Online Learning Skills (*Educause Review*)- <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/HowStudentsDevelopOnlineLearni/157435>

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### **PRINCIPLE 6: Good practice communicates high expectations.**

As the saying goes, “if you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?” Effective instructors have high, but reasonable, expectations for their students. They clearly communicate those expectations and provide support to their students in their efforts to meet those expectations.

**Examples of evidence to look for:** The instructor...

- Explicitly communicates the skills and knowledge every student needs to have in order to be successful in the course.
- Explains course learning goals and how assignments are designed to help students achieve those goals.
- Provides frequent feedback to students through written explanations and detailed feedback on assignments.
- Motivates and encourages students to inspire them to move past the easy answers to more complex solutions.
- Routinely uses critical and probing questions when communicating with students about course assignments and activities.
- Provides examples and non-examples of high quality work, along with a discussion of the differences between these.
- Provides examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals.
- Corrects misguided responses or redirects obvious or easy questions.
- Relates this and previous class(es), or provides students with an opportunity to do so.
- Conveys the purpose of each class activity or assignment.
- Elaborates or repeats complex information.
- Notes new terms or concepts.
- Communicates the reasoning process behind operations and/or concepts.

Where to look online:

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials / Assignment directions
- Assignment dropboxes and e-portfolios

**Additional examples to look for in the face-to-face classroom:** The instructor...

- Provides class goals or objectives for the class session.
- Pauses during explanations to ask and answer questions.

**Resources:**

- “Student Learning Goals and Outcomes” - <http://www.schreyerinsititute.psu.edu/pdf/developingstudentlearninggoalsobjectives.pdf>
- “Assessing and Grading Student Writing” - <http://www.units.miamioh.edu/writingcenter/facultyresources/Grading.html>
- Authentic Assessment Toolbox - <http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm>
- Hybrid Course Syllabus Template from California State University, Sacramento, CA - <http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/instructional/templates.stm>

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