

Refresh your course in three simple steps

A well-designed course has a variety of benefits ranging from supporting individual student success to having a positive impact on larger student retention efforts (Hai-Jew, 2010). After rapidly transitioning courses to fully asynchronous in the spring, making additional modifications to accommodate an uncertain fall semester, and wondering what new challenges the next semester may bring, many faculty are left feeling like a well-designed course is nothing more than a fond memory. In this time of uncertainty, now, maybe more than ever, is a good time to start thinking about future iterations of the courses you teach. As you reflect on your course material in preparation for the spring semester, I encourage you to do three simple things: start at the beginning, support failure, and embrace the adage: “less is more.”

START AT THE BEGINNING

If I were to ask what does it mean to be prepared for your class, could you answer in a single sentence? What are your expectations from students at the start of each semester? With that question in mind, I invite you to view the entry point of your class through the lens of a brand new student. Have you started with information that matters to students? Is it concrete, personal and relevant? Will it help them succeed in your class? Would you know where to start and how to progress through the course in order to master the learning objectives?

It's always a good idea to take a critical look at what elements of the design or delivery of your course content fell short of your expectations so that you can make adjustments for the next semester. Perhaps that is as simple as clarifying instructions or it may require you to completely reframe an assignment. If it's helpful to have a checklist to guide you through updates, take a look at the [UAF eCampus course readiness form](https://teachu.uaf.edu/teaching-tips/readiness-form).

SUPPORT FAILURE

It's not out of the ordinary to consider ways in which the design or delivery of a particular portion of your course failed, but I challenge you to take it a step further and consider how you might create opportunities for your students to fail! Stay with me here. There are any number of inspirational quotes on failure attributed to notable historical

figures such as [Thomas Edison](#) or [Winston Churchill](#), but how many students have been penalized for failure often enough that they are no longer willing to take risks? Research by Wagner (2012) states students quickly learn that the right answer has more value than asking thoughtful questions. This can have a negative impact on their ability to solve real-world, ill-defined problems, so I encourage you to look for ways that you can incorporate opportunities for students to encounter failure in a productive manner that ultimately leads to long-term learning. If you're interested in reading more about failure-based instructional strategies, start with the meta-analysis from Darabi, Arrington and Sayilir (2018) and for practical suggestions, see the [iTeachU resource on failure, feedback and revision](#).

LESS IS MORE

Grab your tablet or your cell phone and pull up your class. Take a look at what is there. Is it easy to navigate or is it cumbersome to wade through? We know that students today access their classes via mobile devices far more frequently than ever before. There are a couple things you can do to make it easier for students who use mobile devices. First, remember that less is more! Eliminate excess menu items, and use consistent organization throughout the structure of the course. Consider incorporating links to files or other locations in the course in assignment instruction thereby eliminating excess clicks and finally, be sure that assignment titles and document names are the same. For more ideas, take a look at a [Teaching Tip about creating mobile-friendly content](#).

References

- Darabi, A., Arrington, T. L., & Sayilir, E. (2018). Learning from failure: A meta-analysis of the empirical studies. *Education Tech Research Dev*, 66, Fd1011-1118.
- Hai-Jew, S. (2010). An instructional design approach to updating an online course curriculum. Retrieved from: <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2010/12/an-instructional-design-approach-to-updating-an-online-course-curriculum>
- Wagner, T. (2012). *Creating innovators: The making of young people who will change the world*. New York: Scribner.