



Online Judaic Studies Consortium

גשר ללימודי יהדות A Bridge to Jewish Learning

Online Judaic Studies Consortium – Tips for Supporting First Year Students

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This year, our school decided to enroll all 8th grade students in an online Introduction to Jewish History course through the Online Judaic Studies Consortium. The prevalence of online learning opportunities in higher education compelled us to prepare our students for successful engagement in the online classroom. At this point in the year, we're a well-oiled machine! When you walk into our classroom, you see every student completely engaged in their online studies: participating in discussion forums, writing blog posts, completing dropbox submissions, and connecting to the material through other creative assignments. But, this wasn't always the scene in the room! At the beginning of the year, forty students arrived with absolutely no online learning experience and a broad range of digital skills--some with virtually no experience using their laptops for academic work. As the site coordinator, I learned a lot about supporting first-time students in the online classroom. Here are my top tips for anyone embarking on a similar endeavor:

Start the year with mini-lessons about submitting the various types of assignments.

In OJSC courses, the students encounter three different types of assignments: discussions, dropbox assignments, and blogs/wikis. At first, my students had a hard time navigating where and how to submit each assignment. Since these assignment types are consistent throughout the school year, it is well worth your time to teach the students how to complete each type of assignment at the beginning of the year. They do cover this material in the OJSC orientation, but my students didn't fully grasp the process until they had to begin submitting their coursework. If you spend some time reviewing the submission process, your students will be able to navigate the online classroom fluently early on in the course.

Reassure the students that you are available as an in-person resource.

For many students, the most nerve-wracking aspect of online learning is feeling disconnected from their teacher and classmates. Reassure your students that you are available to help when they experience challenges throughout their course. Some students may never need the help!

Others may come to you when they need clarification on an assignment or need help decoding a complex article. Simply reassuring your students that you are available will put them at ease as they navigate a new academic experience.

Print out checklists for the students at the start of each week.

Each week in an OJSC course contains a checklist that lists all of the assignments for the week, which you can print out for each student at the start of the week. Giving physical checklists to the students guarantees the students are aware of upcoming deadlines, and it also gives you a chance to check in with each student at least once a week. You might even add reflection questions to the weekly checklist. These help you to get a better sense of how each student is progressing in the course.

Meet weekly with students who need or request support.

At the beginning of the online course, you should meet weekly with all students so you can ensure that they are completing all assignments by the deadlines. Once you have a better understanding of each student's ability to manage the work independently, you can limit your meetings to the students who most need your support. Many students choose online learning because they excel at independent learning, and these students won't need as many check-ins with you. Focus your efforts on supporting students for whom online learning is more challenging. For these students, commit to a weekly in-person meeting, during which they must show you all of their completed work. Having a physical meeting to attend may be more motivating than deadlines they receive from their online teacher.

Be patient.

This is a challenging new endeavor for most students! If you have to repeat instructions for downloading a Google doc as a PDF fifteen (or fifty!) times, that's okay. Eventually, your students will navigate their online classroom with ease!