Building a Community Tip Sheet

Online communities don't build themselves, but with planning and effort a strong online community can be established. An online community helps motivate students, fosters learning, and gives learners a sense of belonging. Below are some ways to build a strong online community.

- A welcome video or an introduction post is a great way for teachers to introduce themselves. A video helps put a face to a name. Either method, however, adds a personal touch.

- Have students introduce themselves by sharing their hobbies, what types of pets they have, their favorite things, one thing they'd like to learn from the course, etc. Encourage students to share a photo or avatar of themselves.

    - Students should only share what they are comfortable sharing. For more information on the pros/cons of sharing video, please see the VALRC Safety & Privacy section of the Quality Teaching Online section of the VALRC website.

- Have students create "classroom" norms such as how to handle conflict or how to respect others.

- Set clear expectations for students. Areas might include attendance, feedback, and grade policies.

- Build trust by encouraging students to ask questions.

- Create opportunities for pairwork, group work, or other peer-to-peer communication and/or support.

    - These opportunities should be short and serve a specific purpose.

    - There are many online tools that can be used for collaborative learning such as breakout rooms or shared Google Docs.

- ○ Include an optional space for students to interact such as a free-for-all discussion forum, virtual coffeehouse space, or an opt-in phone tree or text chain.

  - ○ Most learning management systems (LMSs) have the means to allow students to communicate via email without having to share their personal addresses. This allows for open peer communication while protecting student information.

- Share [online safety](#) and [netiquette tips](#) with students.

- Online tools such as polls, chat, or breakout rooms are [great ways to engage students](#).

- Most importantly, make yourself available. Clearly post and share your contact information, any available "virtual office hours," and your usual response time. Establish boundaries around your personal time but be flexible wherever possible.

  - ○ Consider forwarding your professional email to a personal email in order to protect your private information while making yourself more available to students.

  - ○ For more information on tools for online communication, please see the [Online Learning Tools section](#) of the VALRC website.