

Creating Instructor Presence through Tone in Online Classes

Instructor presence is course design that lets students know there is a person on the other end of the computer.ⁱ There a higher student success rate in online courses when the instructor is seen as authentic, empathetic, and engaged with the course.ⁱⁱ In a study, “high rapport” design practices increased class pass rate by as much as 25%, especially for students with low GPAs.ⁱⁱⁱ

High Rapport Practices

Scheduling warm, encouraging weekly announcements that direct students to assignments, instructions, and tips for success are high rapport practices that help cultivate instructor presence in online courses.^{iv} Connecting assignments to students’ careers can also help encourage student success.^v Inviting students to contact you is another way to encourage rapport and dialogue.^{vi}

How to Achieve a Warm Tone in Announcements

Instructor tone that is social, friendly, and personal positively impacts student performance in online classes.^{vii} Including encouraging phrases in announcements such as those listed below can help create a warm tone that helps students succeed:^{viii}

- “Don’t give up!”
- “Your hard work will pay off.”
- “I am happy to help you if you are struggling with the assignment.”
- “I can tell you put a significant amount of effort into your work, and I appreciate what you did.”
- “Have a safe weekend.”
- “Keep studying hard and it will pay off in the long run.”
- Good luck on the exam!”

Speech Acts that Comprise Instructor Presence

Instructor presence is made up of communication that contains both social presence and cognitive presence speech acts.^{ix} Including both types of speech acts in course communication can help build instructor presence in online courses.

- Social presence speech acts: *accept, react, thank, greet*
- Cognitive presence speech acts: *inquire, request, inform, claim, elaborate, manage*

ⁱ Parrish, C., W., Guffey, S., K., Williams, D.S. Estis, J.M., & Lewis, D. (2021). Fostering cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence with integrated online—team-based learning. *TechTrends*, 65(4), 473-484. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-021-00598-5>

ⁱⁱ Cartee, J., (2021). Strategic empathy in virtual learning and instruction: A contemplative essay about teacher-student rapport during times of crisis. *Journal of Instructional Research*, 10, 12-19. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1314158>

ⁱⁱⁱ Glazier, R. A. (2020). Making human connections in online teaching. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54(1), 175–176. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049096520001535>

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Dickenson, A. (2017). Communicating with the online student: The impact of e-mail tone on student performance and teacher evaluations. *Journal of Educators Online*, 14(2), p. 6. <https://doi.org/10.9743/jeo.2017.14.2.5>

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Zhu, M., Herring, S. C., & Bonk, C. J. (2019). Exploring presence in online learning through three forms of computer-mediated discourse analysis. *Distance Education*, 40(2), 205–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2019.1600365>