Technology-based Teaching with OLAT

(Notes for new and not so new users)

Contents

Preliminary remarks 1
Virtual classrooms and chats (simultaneous digital communication) 2
How to start? 2
Information intake phase 3
Information processing phase (understanding) 4
Memory Phase 4
Control options in the course (Visibility and Access) 5
Communication: Inform transparently and stay in touch 5
Organise teaching beyond the course 5
Continuously improving the course 6
Information on course quality 6
Cooperation among teachers 6
Example: Starting a new topic 6
Further help and useful links 6

Preliminary remarks

In traditional face-to-face teaching, certain forms of teaching have become established. Therefore, it is obvious that when switching to digitally supported teaching, the idea arises of digitally recreating the previously analogue course piece by piece. A show of hands in a seminar becomes digital feedback, groups no longer meet physically but virtually, and so on.

However, this re-creation is not always technically possible and sometimes it misses the desired learning effect.

The path to implementation should therefore not be determined by the form of the previously analogue teaching method, but by the intended learning goal.

We want students to listen/watch, to understand correctly and remember what they have understood, and finally to be able to abstract from what they have learned and ideally to make the step from mere memorisation to mastery of the material.

Virtual classrooms and chats (simultaneous digital communication)

In a face-to-face course, everyone is always present at the same time. The lecturer has an eye on everything and can see, for example, the current level of attention and notice if individuals are distracted. When there are group discussions, perhaps only a few people speak up, but the others are usually attentive as well. Those who contribute are noticed; there is often direct feedback. And of course (e.g. in group work), there is social interaction.

In a virtual course, however, simultaneous communication is often technical, but above all an organisational problem.

If you work with a simultaneous video connection, you assume that all participants have the necessary hardware and a correspondingly good network connection, and that they have it at a fixed time. This is often not the case.

A chat requires fewer technical resources from the learners. However, the result is often confusing and, if the number of participants exceeds 20, ultimately unmanageable without trained moderation. Imagine a group discussion in a seminar where everyone sits blindfolded. And where in a face-to-face event it is directly visible to the lecturer who is holding back and not participating, this can be lost in a chat.

A simultaneous exchange (chat or virtual classroom) also takes away one of the decisive advantages of digitally supported teaching, namely that learners can choose for themselves on which day and at what time of day they deal with the material.

Nevertheless, simultaneous exchange undeniably also has its advantages, e.g. problems of understanding can be solved immediately. However, this form of communication has a great effect, especially with regard to the motivation and attitude of the participants.

In OLAT simultaneaous contact for learning can be achieved with the course element **Forum** and the course element **Virtual classroom**.

What is important are the contributions, their quality and their mutual reference, as well as participation of the learners. It is important that those involved can work together effectively. It is also important that the lecturer receives information about whether it has been understood.

How to start?

The **technical start** in OLAT is simple.

You need to get author rights first (e-mail to olat@rz.uni-frankfurt.de), create a course according to course template 1 (as described in the quick guide for beginners - a collection of links can be found at the end of this text) and then have a rudimentary course in which students can enrol. Only if they are enrolled can they access the content, which is added to the menu at the appropriate protected location.

This course can then be entered in the OLAT catalogue (see www.olat.uni-frankfurt.de/faq).

The **didactical start** is more demanding.

As with the planning of analogue courses, it is worthwhile to define learning objectives in advance and then, based on these, to determine content and didactic methods or their implementation.

How exactly should the course participants benefit from this course? What knowledge should they be able to access reliably afterwards? What competences should they have learned and practised?

Information intake phase

Knowledge transfer depends on structure, and precisely because OLAT offers so many possibilities, it is important to plan a course menu that is structured as clearly as possible with main areas and further sub-areas. Such areas can be, for example, individual dates, topics or assignments. Those responsible for the course are free to design them as they wish.

OLAT provides the element **Structure** for structuring the course. This is a subheading which can be subordinated to other subheadings (structure elements). The structure element has some helpful features. Permissions (filters) set in Visibility or Access are inherited by all elements one level below.

In the template course, the element **Course content** is such a sub-heading, and a **Folder** is subordinate to it. The fact that this folder is subordinate can be seen from the fact that the subheading must first be unfolded in order to reach the folder.

The classic form of information transfer is the lecture given by the lecturer in the lecture hall. It is little or not at all interactive. The point is to impart knowledge in a structured form, often accompanied by a presentation.

This form of teaching can be reproduced well digitally, because a lecture can be recorded and transmitted later via a stream. This can then be linked to within a learning platform so that, from the learner's point of view, the lecture is part of the course.

Films, video clips and other large files should not be uploaded to learning platforms but only linked to them.

OLAT provides the element **LTI tool** for lecture recordings and similar. This is already connected to the recording software (video portal), which the media technology of the University Computer Centre uses for recordings in the lecture hall. Only those who are enrolled in the course then have access to the recording. Detailed instructions can be found in the help at the end of the text.

The most frequently used element in OLAT is the **Folder**. In general, literature is made available here for download by course participants. This is handled more elegantly by the element **Media center** with self-chosen folder substructures. An alternative, if you do not want to upload the literature yourself (or are not allowed to do so due to copyright regulations), is to link directly to the e-journals of the university library. This can be done with the element **Bibliography**.

Of course, you can also link to informative websites using the External page element. If you have a whole list of informative websites, you can also present them with the element **Link list**.

If you want to present information yourself in an edited form, you can make it available with the element **Single page** (an HTML interface). If you have planned a whole series of such pages as a reader, perhaps with linked youtube clips and the like, you can bundle these pages in the element **CP learning content**.

You may also have content from other learning platforms or authoring systems. If you have them available in the appropriate format, you can also integrate them into the OLAT course with the element **SCORM learning content**.

These different ways of making content available open up one of the advantages of virtual teaching: **repeatability**. What is retrievable in a course can normally be retrieved as often as desired as long as access to the course exists.

Information processing phase (understanding)

The next step is to ensure that the information is not only absorbed but also correctly understood.

Individual work

The typical building blocks for an automated check of comprehension are **Test** und **Self-test**. The *task pool* is the tool for creating tests (including self-tests) and surveys. Here, detailed feedback can be set, both for incorrectly and correctly answered questions, as well as for total points achieved.

In addition to the automated assessment options, there are also elements for which assessments are made manually. The typical element for homework is the **Task** element. Related to it is the **Portfolio task** element, except that here the learner submits a whole series of assignments and reflections bundled in a virtual scrapbook at the end of the semester and is then assessed.

If one wants to assess other achievements of a person, e.g. a contribution in a wiki, a blog entry or a forum post, the **Assessment** element can be used.

Working in groups

All of these elements have in common, that learners do not have access to the solution suggestions of the other course participants.

This is different when an element of the type **Task** is released for *peer review*. Then students assess each other's performance (anonymously).

The **Forum** element opens a discussion in which everyone can participate. Contributions can be commented on here. However, a forum is not a 'self-runner'; it always needs clear questions or other impulses. The **File discussion** element is similar, except that there is a file at the beginning that is to be discussed.

And then there is a whole range of tools that learners can use cooperatively to create a shared knowledge base - the **Blog** and **Podcast** tools for text or audio contributions, and the **Wiki** tool, which, like Wikipedia articles, builds hypertext-linked pages that can be posted for discussion and are versioned. While these tools can also be used by course leaders to convey information, they develop their strength in the impetus for learners to work cooperatively.

The already familiar **Folder** can also be used here if learners are allowed to upload files in its *Access tab*.

Of course, not everyone has to work together all the time - OLAT allows the creation of groups, which then work on tasks separately.

Memory Phase

The core of memory is links between contents, and these are created through repetition. All the building blocks described can be the subject of repetition.

The **Self-test** is the typical tool to check one's own understanding. Learning with slips of paper and notes can also be found in the **Flashcard Set**, but in a more differentiated way, with tags and built-in learning aids.

If students create their own **ePortfolio** to reflect on what they have learned in a learning diary, this can also improve memory for the learning material.

Control options in the course (Visibility and Access)

OLAT allows the most far-reaching control of information access. For each course element you can determine when it can be seen and opened by whom under which conditions in the menu. For this purpose, you use the permission settings (course filter) visibility and access, which are provided for each course element.

For example, if the course has a high complexity, it is advisable to tie the visibility of the individual course elements to dates and thus only open the course gradually.

It is also possible to create *learning paths* through the course, e.g. by ensuring that only learners who have passed an assignment/test with a set score are shown further chapters.

Communication: Inform transparently and stay in touch

You can manage your participants in the *group management*. There you can also write to them directly. The **E-mail** element is intended for e-mails in the opposite direction. Here you can already specify a subject and a salutation, which makes it easier to contact you. The element **Messages** is intended for messages that participants receive from the course. Appointments can be entered in the **Calendar**.

If the course is large with many tutors, they can introduce themselves in an internal **Profile**.

Transparency in teaching also includes disclosing the learning goals from the beginning and making it clear how these are reflected in the structure of the course and how it is run. Such an introductory presentation can, for example, be integrated into the course as an HTML page linked to a **Structure** element.

This can be flanked by the field *Description* of the individual element. If you note there, especially in the case of expected learner performance, which knowledge and which competence is to be practised or tested here, this is helpful information for the learners and, if necessary, a corrective for the teachers so that they do not inadvertently ask questions that do not meet the learning objective.

Transparency can also include announcing course evaluation results (see section 'Continuously improving the course') in the course.

Organise teaching beyond the course

Much of the organisational work can also be done within the course.

If a teacher would like to organise consultation hours, the element **Date allocation** can be used. The element **Topic assignment** brings together seminar topics, their supervisors and interested students. A joint project with different responsibilities, partly assigned, partly self-selected, can be managed with the element **Check list**.

Continuously improving the course

Information on course quality

Indirect indications can be obtained from the *course statistics* (in the drop-down menu of the course). If there are course elements that are never or almost never called up, they are either not found in the course or not considered relevant.

One possibility, of course, is to allow direct questions about the course. Set up a **Forum** for this and allow *anonymous* contributions to lower the inhibition threshold. Here you can be made aware of course problems that you had not thought of before. In an *anonymous* **Forum**, you can also ask participants questions yourself if there are organisational or technical aspects for which you would like feedback.

You can receive prepared anonymous feedback with the help of the **Survey** element. You can also allow free response formats, with which you can, for example, ask for suggestions for improvement.

Such teaching evaluations should take place during the course, not only towards the end. In this way, you can take corrective action at an early stage if necessary.

Cooperation among teachers

The special thing about OLAT is that behind many of the elements mentioned there is so-called *learning content*. And for such learning content you can make colleagues co-owners. For example, you could jointly develop an informative feedback survey or compile a media library. Each of the owners can then use this resource in their own courses, but without having access to their colleagues' courses.

Example: Starting a new topic

A social science or humanities topic could be introduced by an opinion poll (element **Survey**), a natural science topic by means of a basic knowledge **Test**. Participation is compulsory and access is limited. (With surveys, however, it is not possible to check who has participated, they are anonymous).

The results of the survey are announced in the course (as a **Single page**). This is followed by a Discussion **forum** with fixed rules (e.g. everyone writes a contribution by a fixed time, then leave a day gap, then everyone responds to at least one contribution with comments).

Based on the results of the prior knowledge test, the teacher can decide what knowledge can be assumed and what not. It may be necessary to include basic elements, e.g. as a reader (**CP learning content**), followed by comprehension questions by means of a **Test**, and only when these have been successfully completed is the new material taught.

Further help and useful links

The quick guide for beginners can be found at: https://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/138901027.pdf

The FAQ answers the most frequently asked questions about OLAT: https://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/92848296/FAQs_for_OLAT_Authors

And the Team Lernsysteme will be happy to answer your questions: lernsysteme@rz.uni-frankfurt.de