

Electronic Communication with Students

Instructional Strategy – What is it?

This protocol outlines a method for instructors to reach out to students in three different scenarios: 1) when students are absent from class, 2) in response to student emails, and 3) to communicate to the entire class. The protocol involves working in advance to develop supportive messages to send to students, and then identifying ways to adapt the messages based on timing and individual student circumstances.

Why does it work?

Students who are absent from class can feel disconnected, both academically and socially, from the course. By making authentic, direct contact with absent students in real-time instructors are conveying that the student's presence in class was missed, and that the student is welcomed in the course. Although responding to individual student emails can help student's feel connected to the course, it can be extremely time-consuming. Sending class-wide updates at key times during the semester can help deliver key instructional and motivational messages to students. This protocol helps streamline the communication process with students and promotes perceptions of social belonging.

Examples:

1. Email Response to Absent Students

Suggested checklist for Email to Absent Students:

- Subject line such as: "Class Today"
- Opening line such as "We missed you in class today. I hope everything is OK."
- If appropriate, address any circumstances that you think are relevant. Example: "I hope the doctor's appointment you told me about went well."
- Give a very brief description of what happened in class that day.
- If appropriate, remind them of any important items due on or before the next class.
- Encourage them to contact another student in class for other information and remind them they can also visit office hours.
- Ending line such as: "I hope to see you at our next class."

Sample Message:

Hi Chris,

We missed you in class today. I hope everything is OK.

Today in class we started Lesson 3.1 and we will finish it tomorrow. Just a quick reminder that we have a quiz on Lessons 2.4 and 2.5 in the next class. You should make sure to study the Pythagorean theorem in your textbook.

I encourage you to contact one of your group members for more information or for notes. Also, please feel free to drop by my classroom if you have any questions.

I hope to see you in class tomorrow.

Best regards,

2. Email Response Routine

Suggested Checklist for responding to student-initiated emails:

- Opening line uses student's name and thanks him/her for the message: "Hello, Maria. Thank you for your message."
- Acknowledge the main reason the student sent the message, or any relevant circumstances, as appropriate.
- Answer any questions posed by the student in the message.
- Provide any information on a class missed (or to be missed) by the student, if appropriate.
- Ending line such as: "I hope to see you at our next class."
- Re-read the message to make sure there is no judgmental or insensitive language and instead communicates respect for the student.
- Check the length of the message. The shorter and clearer the response, the more likely it is that the important information will be communicated effectively.

Sample Message:

Hello Dana,

Thanks for your message. I appreciate you letting me know you'll be missing class tomorrow. Sorry to hear you're ill and I hope that you are feeling better soon.

To answer your question: Yes, we still will have our exam next Monday.

Tomorrow in class we will be having a review session and I may provide some handouts. (As a reminder, you can always check the class web site to see what's happening in class and to get handouts I've provided.)

I hope to see you in class soon.

Best Regards,

3. Weekly or Daily Update Email Messages

Suggested Checklist for Weekly or Daily Update Email Messages:

- For weekly emails: Opening line welcomes students to the new week and includes highlights that are different from the regular routine.
- For daily emails: Opening line contains reminders about deadlines.
- Material to be covered in each class is listed by day.
- Due dates for written assignments are listed on the appropriate days.
- Due dates for online assignments are listed on the appropriate days.
- In-class assessments are noted.

Sample Daily Update Message:

Hello Math xxx students,

This is a reminder that homework for Lesson x.x.x is due tomorrow. We'll also have a quiz covering xxx.

If you have questions about the homework try to contact a group member or come by my office hour before class.

See you in class tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Sample Weekly Update Email Message:

Hello Students,

Welcome to week 4 of the semester. Remember that the exam on the Pythagorean Theorem is coming up at the beginning of week 5. We'll have a review at the end of this week.

Let me know if you have any questions.

I'll see you tomorrow at 8 a.m!

Tuesday 2/5	
Textbook Pages	10-22
Bring to Class	<i>the handout from Friday! (I emailed it if you were absent)</i>
Covered in Class	<i>Formula for Pythagorean Theorem, practice!</i>
Thursday 2/7	
Textbook Pages	22-35
Bring to Class	<i>the review problems from class</i>
Covered in Class	<i>Review game! Review for the Test!</i>

Best Regards,