

# Essentials:

# Structure and Routine in Online Courses

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**R**ecent studies indicate the importance of consistency and structure for students learning online. Data obtained from surveys of students enrolled in asynchronous courses offered by the State University of New York indicate that three factors “contribute significantly to the success of asynchronous online courses. These factors are *a course structure that is both clear and consistent*, an instructor who interacts frequently and productively with students, and a constructive and dynamic discussion between students and their peers.”<sup>1</sup>

In addition, researchers at the University of British Columbia who evaluated 127 courses offered online “have concluded that appearance and structure can make or break an online course.”<sup>2</sup> As I ponder about “why” structure is so important, I think it is connected to the AVLN standard concerning “thinking.” It seems that higher levels of thinking are not possible in chaotic, online courses. Structure is the key!

Given the importance of structure in an online course, we shall examine two areas in this article: (1) creating a familiar structure by comparing standard components of face-to-face classes with online classes, and (2) creating course routine by using a consistent template for each module. ✍

**By Janine Lim**

*This is an introduction to an article by Janine Lim, an Instructional Technology Consultant at the Berrien County Intermediate School District in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She is an active Adventist Virtual Learning Network (AVLN) board member and chair of the AVLN Course Committee. She also teaches online regularly for AVLN, the Berrien County ISD, and the ATA Technology Academy, a Michigan grant project. The article explores the virtual equivalent of the classroom door, the furniture, the schedule, and the walls. It also demonstrates how four specific classes have addressed the need for structure in online environments. Read the complete article at <http://www.avln.org/jae>.*



## REFERENCES

1. Karen Swan, “Virtual Interaction: Design Factors Affecting Student Satisfaction and Perceived Learning in Asynchronous Online Courses,” *Distance Education* 22:2 (2001), pp. 306-331.
2. Kelly McCollum, “Researchers Pick Best and Worst Web Courses,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 44 (February 27, 1998), p. A29.